

THE
ADVANTAGES
OF THE
MORALITY OF THE BIBLE
CONSIDERED,
CHIEFLY WITH REGARD TO THE PRESENT LIFE,
*An opposition to the Objections against Revealed Religion, contained in the
erroneous and gloomy Doctrines of*
DEISM AND INFIDELITY:
IN
THREE SERMONS.

BY THE REV. JOHN CLARKE,
CUREATE OF ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL, WEARDALE.

NEWCASTLE:

PRINTED BY J. WHITFIELD,

AND SOLD BY HIM AND THE OTHER BOOKSELLERS IN NEWCASTLE,
DURHAM, ALNWICK, MORPETH, SUNDERLAND, SHIELDS, &c.

PREFACE.

THOUGH the three following Sermons were at first composed only for the Use of the Author's own Congregation, he has, notwithstanding, been induced to offer them to the Notice of the Public, from a Conviction that every Person to whom Revelation is dear, ought to contribute his Mite, in one Way or other, in order to obviate the baneful Effects of Deism; and to stem the Torrent of Infidelity, which in its rapid Career, especially in a neighbouring Nation, threatens to inundate the World, and thus to overwhelm the human Species in the Gulf of Misery and Ruin.

As an Apology for the Plan pursued in these Discourses for the above Purpose, it may be remarked that, to secure Obedience, Nothing seems so effectual a Mean as the Allurement of present Advantage. In any Emergency, convince Mankind that their immediate Interest and Happiness are deeply concerned, and you thereby lay hold of a most powerful Motive for raising their Exertions in Defence of such Advantages.

Hence, to promote Obedience to the moral Precepts of Scripture, it needs, one would imagine, but to be proved that such Obedience is the best Means we can use, in order not only to avoid present Infelicity, but to attain the most pure and permanent, even of all worldly Enjoyments; and that when we renounce our Bible, and depend solely upon Reason, (which, though the noblest Faculty of the human Mind, is yet, in the present Constitution of our Nature, at all Times so liable to be prejudiced and perverted) we then enter the high Road which in general leads to Ignorance and Error, to Guilt and Wretchedness. It is therefore hoped, that a perusal of the following Discourses will, in some Degree at least, tend to convince every unprejudiced Mind, that, of all the Plans of Happiness we can possibly devise, that of making the Rules of Scripture our Guide through Life, and their Promises of future Felicity our Hope in Death, is by far the most substantial; and the only one indeed, which will neither mock our Pursuits nor disappoint our Hopes. On the Contrary, we shall find that this Mode of attaining Happiness will fully answer our reasonable Expectations here, and will, moreover, exalt us in the End to Honour, Glory, and Immortality in the Heavens.

S E R M O N I.

PROVERBS III. 17.

HER WAYS ARE WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS, AND ALL HER PATHS ARE PEACE.

THOUGH in general it must be evident to every one in the least conversant with the Bible, that the uniform tendency of its precepts is to promote the happiness of mankind, both in this world and in that which is to come; yet, notwithstanding this benevolent design, attempts have lately been made to derogate from its Sacred authority and truth; and by that means, to bring it into discredit and contempt.

An individual of our own nation, who, on account of his new theory of civil government, has lately attracted the attention of all Europe, and perhaps, of the greatest part of the civilized world, is now unhappily endeavouring to disseminate opinions tending to falsify and set aside the Holy Scriptures.

An account of the propagation of these deistical tenets has, to my certain knowledge, reached many of you: nay, if report says true, the book itself containing these doctrines is actually in the hands of several in this neighbourhood. I, therefore, consider it as my duty to obviate, as much as I possibly can, the very serious evils which must unavoidably arise from the adoption of such mistaken and dangerous notions concerning revealed religion.

I flatter myself, indeed, that most of you are so well convinced of the truth and advantage of the *Sacred Writings*, that, in the words of an Apostle, *ye will continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel which ye have heard;** and therefore, that you will not part with your Bibles for all the gloomy doctrines which *infidels* and *deists*† can possibly spread abroad and inculcate

A

in

* Col. i. 23.

† The word *infidel* is generally applied to him who disbelieves Christianity, or rejects Jesus Christ and the Religion, which He and his Apostles taught to the world. And a *deist* (who, also, is an infidel) is one who, though he professes to believe the being of a God, yet at the same time, denies all revealed, and acknowledges only natural, religion, or the dictates of his fallible reason; and will not, of course, allow the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be of Divine authority, or a Revelation of the will of God.

in the world. Such doctrines, you may be sure, will only tend to make you unhappy, not only from their weakening your sense of obligation to the practice of virtue, but also from their cruelly depriving you of that animating hope of a blessed and glorious immortality beyond the grave, brought to light by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Even with regard to the present life, were you diligently to follow the directions of your Bible, you would soon be convinced, by happy experience, that *Wisdom's ways are ways of PLEASANTNESS, and that all her paths are PEACE.*

In discoursing therefore upon these words, I shall confine myself, chiefly, to the consideration of the beneficial effects derived to us in this world from obeying the moral precepts of the Old and New Testament.

The maxim expressed in the text is of so interesting a nature that one would imagine we would all be thereby induced to *apply our hearts unto wisdom, even the wisdom that is from above*, in order to acquire that delightful tranquillity of mind which is the natural and necessary consequence of such application: since, whatever promises to be the means of communicating to us happiness or pleasure we generally embrace with the utmost avidity. Pleasure is, indeed, the grand pursuit of the sons of men. The desire of it is so congenial with our nature, that sometimes, for the sake of purchasing even a *momentary* enjoyment, man will not scruple previously to undergo the most fatiguing toils, and to encounter considerable difficulties and dangers.

It however unfortunately happens, that what, by the world, is generally denominated pleasure, is often, in fact, the parent of pain, and the source of the greatest infelicity. On this account, it is certainly well worth our attention to consider what sort of conduct seems chiefly adapted to secure the substantial possession of that which is so much the universal pursuit, even of genuine and permanent pleasure; that pleasure which, from an impropriety in the means commonly employed to acquire it, so often eludes our grasp, and at last leaves us chagrined and disappointed. Nay, instead of obtaining what we so ardently pursued, we often unexpectedly find ourselves plunged into an abyss of wretchedness and ruin.

To avoid this unhappiness, then, and to acquire the possession of the truest earthly enjoyment, the conduct which I would earnestly recommend to your most serious attention, is that which is recommended throughout the Bible.

And to convince you that a conduct regulated in every respect by *Wisdom*, or, in other words, by the *precepts of Religion*, is calculated, above every other method, to secure the happiness, and therefore, the only true pleasure,

of

of the present life, I shall beg leave to set before you the chief moral precepts of Scripture, and to consider what effect, in regard to happiness, the due observance of each of these is likely to produce in our lives.

In conducting this subject it may seem proper to begin with the ten commandments, which God himself delivered, by the mediation of Moses, to the children of Israel while sojourning in the Wilderness; not only because these are the leading moral precepts of the Old Testament, but because our blessed Lord, when he came from heaven to earth, took every opportunity, both by his doctrine and example, to elucidate, confirm, and establish them. To proceed then:

I. In the first commandment we are taught to have no other Gods but one, even that one true God, who is the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth.

Now this precept, if we consider it aright, we shall find wisely adapted to promote our temporal happiness. The heathen world, we know, had *Gods many and Lords many*;* and some of these have been described as endowed with attributes the most debasing and impure, and even shocking to relate. It may therefore easily be inferred, what sort of behaviour a contemplation of the character of such deities would naturally produce in their worshippers.

Accordingly we find that, not only in compliance with the evil propensities of corrupt nature, but also in imitation of the conduct of their imaginary deities, whose characters had no doubt been originally drawn to suit their depraved dispositions, the heathens were accustomed to indulge in whatever their predominant inclinations prompted them to. With minds, therefore, deeply corrupted, and wholly under the influence of the grossest idolatry, they *gave themselves over unto lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness*;† and, moreover, frequently practised, as acts of religious worship, such vile and detestable enormities as cannot, without a violation of decency, be named amongst Christians. Yea, so much were they devoted to the worship of their abominable idols, and—in consequence thereof—so deadened in their breasts were the feelings of humanity, that, in their blind, senseless, and stupid zeal for their religion, they offered even human sacrifices on their altars; nay, horrid to relate! they scrupled not, in honour of their Gods, to *make their sons and daughters to pass through the fire*.

What

* 1 Cor. viii. 5.

|

† Eph. iv. 19.

What sort of pleasure, then, can we imagine, would mankind enjoy in so deplorable a state of human nature, as exhibited to our astonished imaginations from a contemplation of the heathen world? Certainly, if any, the most irrational, wretched, and absurd.

But, to turn our thoughts from this dismal review of the idolatrous heathens, let us, on the other hand, consider the consequence of worshipping and obeying the *one true God*—of imitating the Divine Character as delineated in the Bible, which is that of a wise, just, good, and merciful Being—of one who wills the happiness of all his creatures. The consequence, then, of acting thus, as every one who has fairly made the experiment will readily allow, is (speaking merely as to this world)—to enjoy the present life with the truest relish and delight.—To be wise and good, to be just and holy, to be patient and pure, to be kind and merciful—this is to imitate the God of heaven, and this is to be happy—happy in ourselves, and, in some degree at least, to diffuse happiness on all around us.

But let us further consider that we, who are denominated christians, may, in many respects, transgress this commandment, though we should not professedly pay adoration to the gods of the heathen world, nor to any created existence whatever, such as the sun, moon, or stars; or the likeness of an angel, or of any illustrious departed saint. Without, therefore, worshipping these, or such as these, we may justly be said to forget the true God, when, contrary to the precepts of our Bible, we fix our affections on other objects,—on the accumulation of superfluous wealth, for instance. In such a case, it is evident that riches become the idol of our hearts. To all intents and purposes may we be said to worship these, and to neglect the Lord of heaven and earth, *who giveth us power to get wealth.*† We cannot, however, as our blessed Saviour informs us, *serve God and Mammon*; and when we thus bestow all our thoughts in contriving schemes to hoard up riches, we are undoubtedly guilty of a breach of this commandment. What, then, is generally the consequence, supposing the greatest success to attend the pursuit of earthly gain? Is there any thing in accumulated wealth that can fully satisfy our desires and render us happy? Let the experience of mankind answer and say whether the acquisition of great riches has ever conferred felicity. So far from it, innumerable have been the instances where men, while in moderate circumstances, have enjoyed a tolerable share of sublunary happiness, but who, afterwards, in consequence of the future
abundance

† Deut. viii. 18.

abundance with which they have been favoured by a bountiful Providence, unexpectedly experienced a large portion of mental infelicity. And the reason of this is obvious. For, instead of being thankful to Heaven, and employing its gifts to the purposes for which they were bestowed, they have forgotten the munificent hand that conferred these earthly blessings; and have, over and above this, abused them to the purposes of vice and extravagance, which have always misery in their train.

These benefits, therefore, which ought to have melted them into gratitude and obedience, and of course, promoted their happiness, have only served to alienate their affections from Heaven, to increase their worldly cares, to create new desires after greater acquisitions. And, to gratify these desires, men are often tempted to commit acts of fraud and injustice, of cruelty and oppression. Thus are they rendered not only unhappy in themselves, but they, moreover, become the cause of unhappiness and misery to others.

Hence, we may infer, that as the all-wise Creator perfectly knows who of us are unable to resist the temptations of prosperity; so, out of a regard to our happiness, he often withholds it from us, and keeps us in low circumstances. Others, again, who are determined *at all events* to be rich, he permits to accomplish their wishes, in order to punish them for their *covetousness which is idolatry*.* *They that will be rich, says an apostle, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.*†

Riches, indeed, acquired by fair means, and applied to promote the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind, may prove a real blessing and a distinguishing favour of Heaven to the possessor. It is not, therefore, riches themselves, that deserve our reprehension, but only the intemperate pursuit of them; because such pursuit is often productive of much misery in the world. For how many are there amongst us who, not content with the fruits of a fair and honourable industry, watch with anxious vigilance, every opportunity in order to defraud and over-reach; and, notwithstanding the generous and benevolent spirit of that holy religion which they profess, endeavour by all possible means, to engross every profit and advantage to themselves, and thereby, unfeelingly to deprive others of their fellow-creatures, even of the necessary means of subsistence! And this is a vice so common and so insatiable, that numbers who are guilty of it can by no means be persuaded that they are so in reality. Instead of allowing this, they are ever ready to fall upon any pretence whatever in order to excuse

B

their

* Col. iii. 5.

|

† 1 Tim. vi. 9.

their avarice and to justify their sordid proceedings. Such, however, ought to remember, that our Saviour warns us to *take heed and beware of covetousness*;^{*} and an apostle declares that *the love of money is the root of all evil*.[†] And does not the sad and woeful experience of all ages evince the truth of this apostolic assertion? Has not the inordinate pursuit of gain been, in general, the copious source of frauds, cruelties, and murders; and of dishonest dealings of every description?‡

The same observations will apply to the ardent pursuit of worldly ambition, or to the immoderate indulgence in sensual pleasures—the gratification of those *fleshy lusts which war against the soul*.§ For what are these but, in effect, the worshipping of our depraved and vicious inclinations to the neglect of the God of heaven, who hath enjoined us self-denial and a regulation of our inferior appetites and passions, as a means to preclude infelicity, and to promote our real pleasure and well-being? And in order to be convinced, that they who thus give the reins to their eager desires after worldly greatness, or to the carnal propensities of corrupt nature, become obnoxious to every species of wretchedness, (in which, we may remark, they also, along with themselves, frequently involve the innocent) we need only reflect on the numbers who, in every age, have smarted under the lash of forbidden indulgence; or who, in consequence of the aspiring views of a restless and unbounded ambition, have been precipitated from an elevated rank and station in life to the lowest degradation, or reduced from a comfortable competency to the utmost penury and distress. Nay, if we look around us, how many may we observe at present, who are pining out a wearisome life of languor and disease, of want and wretchedness, from having spent their health and substance in the sink of intemperance, and in an inordinate pursuit of worldly pleasure, or of a selfish pre-eminence!

II. As, in the first commandment, we are enjoined to worship no other than the one true God, even the Almighty Maker, Governor, and Judge of the world; so, in the second, we are prohibited the worshipping of the true God under any sort of similitude or symbol of the divine presence; and are not, therefore, to represent the invisible, the peerless Jehovah, in the likeness of any creature in heaven, in the earth, or in the waters; which, however improbable to us, has yet frequently been done by different idolatrous nations.

Now,

^{*} Luke xii. 15. | [†] 1 Tim. vi. 10.

[‡] ——— Quid non mortalia pectora cogis
Auri sacra fames! ——— VIRG. Æn. iii. 56.

[§] 1 Pet. ii. 11.

Now, if the breach of the first commandment, or the worshipping of false Gods, has, as we have already seen, had so unhappy an influence on mankind, the false worship of the true God, or the paying religious adoration to him through the medium of any visible form or figure, is no less calculated to corrupt the morals of men, and to make them unhappy.

To be convinced of this we should remember, that the devout worship of God, as well as a sincere obedience to his commands, can only proceed from the just and exalted notions we entertain concerning the Divine character. We ought to consider him as a Being who is infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, who is a constant, though invisible, witness, not only of the *actions* of his creatures, but of the very *thoughts* and *purposes* of their hearts; who, moreover, being a God of unspotted purity and holiness, of course hates all iniquity, and will severely punish the despisers of his laws, and the finally impenitent; but who, at the same time, *as he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy, will pardon the iniquity and pass by the transgression** of such as truly turn unto him; and will, over and above, confer upon them and upon all his faithful and obedient servants innumerable and inestimable benefits and blessings both here and hereafter.

But what exalted notions of the nature of the Deity, or what reverence for him can we be supposed to entertain, when he is set forth to us in the likeness of an ox or a calf, (and by the latter of these, the rebellious Israelites, more than once, represented the true God) or even of any created being infinitely superior to these in the scale of existence?

When the Supreme Lord of the Universe, I say, is thus degradingly exhibited to our view, our veneration for him must degenerate into mere superstition, or rather, we must have no veneration for him at all. Hence must ensue a contempt of his laws. And when men have once cast off all regard for the laws of the Most High, they will not scruple (provided it can be done without incurring the penalty of human laws) to give free and full indulgence to their irregular appetites. And what must follow from hence but, in general, every species of infelicity and wretchedness?

To make you farther sensible of the misery consequent on the breach of this commandment, reflect on the heathen nations of antiquity, all of whom were, *originally*, possessed of the knowledge of the true God, and instructed in the worship due unto his Name. But, by following the bent of their own corrupt hearts, and hearkening to the suggestions of the Tempter, the grand Adversary and Enemy of mankind, they began to set up, as representations of the Deity, images of various kinds, the work of their own hands,

* Micah. vii. 18.

hands, and through these, to worship the Lord Jehovah. Proceeding thus from bad to worse, they came at length to pay divine adoration to the images themselves. *When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but changed his glory into an image, made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things—and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.** The consequence of which was, that at last they became so thoroughly depraved, and so totally regardless of every duty required of them by the God of heaven, as to be (in the words of St. Paul) *filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.†* Now it is evident, that such a shocking complication of vices could not fail of producing, in those who were guilty of them, the most consummate wretchedness.

Contemplate also the nations in the world who are at present notorious for the worship of images, and behold the gross immoralities that prevail! and where immoralities prevail, your own experience will teach you, misery prevails in proportion.

Hence may be clearly seen the goodness of the Almighty to us, considered only with regard to the present life, in confining our religious adorations to himself alone.

Be persuaded, then, that in order to be happy in this world, you must not only worship no other than the one true, invisible, eternal God, who spoke into existence the stupendous fabric of the Universe; but also, you must worship him in a devout and proper manner—in *spirit and in truth,‡* and without the intervention of any visible representation of his tremendous and incomprehensible Majesty.

III. The third commandment prohibits the taking of the name of God in vain. And this we may be said to do. 1st. when, in a court of justice, we swear a false oath; for this is most daringly and impiously calling upon our Maker to be witness to a lie. 2dly. when, through a contracted and abominable habit, we frequently use, in our common conversation, the name of God, or of any thing sacred, in a light, thoughtless, and irreverent manner. Or, lastly, when, through the heat of passion, we curse and swear, and in dreadful execrations, invoke the vengeance of Heaven upon ourselves, or upon those of our fellow-creatures with whom we have any concerns.

Now,

* Rom. i. 21, 23, 25. | † Rom. i. 29, 30, 31. | ‡ John iv. 23.

Now, can any thing lessen more our reverence for the Almighty, and consequently, more deprive us of happiness, by weakening our sense of obligation to the obedience of the divine law, than thus wantonly and wickedly trifling with the Sacred Name of God, and by our blasphemous speeches insulting the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth?

Besides, it is scarcely possible to conceive any thing so shocking, or so grating to the ears of people of decency as the profane language of a common swearer. To hear a person, on every trifling occasion, pouring forth a torrent of needless oaths, filling up the vacuities of his empty discourse with unmeaning execrations, and in horrid accents calling for damnation on his own soul, or on the souls of his neighbours,—must certainly wound the feelings of every one present who has a regard for God and religion; or, setting that aside, a regard for common decency. And so universally does this vice prevail that seldom can we go into any mixed public company, but our ears are almost incessantly stunned with oaths and curses.

One would indeed imagine that, considering how vulgar, rude, and blustering the language of the swearer is, this odious custom would be altogether banished, at least from the polite world, were it only on the score of common good manners, and from a wish not to offend the ears of people of education and good-breeding. And it must be owned that, whatever others may do, the *truly* polite will abhor this detestable habit; for it is certainly inconsistent with, and far beneath, the character of a really polite and benevolent man to wound the feelings of his fellow-creatures with the harsh and vulgar language of imprecation.

Hence it is evident that the prohibition in this commandment has a manifest tendency to promote our own happiness, and also that of those around us, by inducing in all a decent and engaging conversation.

IV. In the fourth commandment we are enjoined to keep the sabbath-day holy, and not to follow our usual employments of bodily labour, or the exercise of such trades and callings as are lawful only on other days. And, considered merely under a temporal view, nothing could have been contrived more favourable to the interests of humanity, or the general good of mankind than this precept.

Had unfeeling man been left to himself to regulate the labours of his dependent brethren, and to pronounce when they were to work and when to rest, it is more than probable that the lower orders of mankind would, in the course of a few years, have been worn out with the incessant toil of the hands and sweat of the brow.

The brute-creation, too, we may suppose, would have shared the same fate. For since the desire of the covetous never is satisfied; on the contrary,

since the increase of wealth generally begets, in a heart devoted to the world and under the influence of avarice, a more ardent thirst and pursuit after earthly possessions,* we may naturally conclude that the lower ranks of men, together with the labouring part of the inferior animals, would, in too many instances, have been condemned to almost perpetual toil, in order to comply with the insatiable desires of their avaricious employers. No returns of a seventh day or sabbath of rest, would have occurred to refresh the weary limbs of the labourer, or to recruit the exhausted strength of the horse or the ox.

How wise, then, is the regulation of one day in seven for the purposes of rest and refreshment to the weary ! Even the expectation of a returning day of ease tends to alleviate the toil of the peasant, and to enable him to go through his usual task with alacrity and cheerfulness.

This regulation of one day of rest in seven, seems also wisely contrived for promoting and carrying on the secular business of human life. More frequent intervals of cessation from labour would appear but ill adapted for advancing our worldly concerns ; whereas, if such intervals less often recurred, still no advantage, it is probable, would thereby accrue to any one. For though, in this latter case, the interests of the higher orders might seem to be promoted, yet, in reality, would it be otherwise. This will appear evident if we consider that the time thus appropriated to work, being protracted beyond a reasonable duration, would certainly render the prospect of returning rest distant and cheerless to those engaged in servile employments ; who, disheartened with the idea of long and immoderate confinement to their respective occupations, could, probably, perform less work for their employers than when indulged with more frequently returning days of ease and relaxation.

To the above observations it may perhaps be objected, that the State would have taken care to settle the proper intervals of rest and labour, supposing no such distribution of time had been determined by the divine law. Now, admitting this to have been the case,—though it is by no means certain, that any State would have fixed such intervals in a manner so suitable to the general benefit of mankind as they are at present,—yet, we may easily conceive, that no human laws whatever could have produced that decent regularity, order, and tranquillity which invariably attend the due observance of the fourth commandment—the keeping holy the sabbath day, and joining in the public worship of God.

When

* *Crescentem sequitur cura pecuniam*
Majorumque fames.

HOR. B. iii. ODE 16. 17.

When men are not under the necessity of following their daily labour, they will generally employ themselves in something or other. A desire of pleasure will naturally lead those who have no sense of religion on their minds to restrain them from the practice of vice, to an indulgence of their animal appetites, and that even to excess. This, again, will frequently involve them in difficulties, and of course make them unhappy, if not wretched and miserable. On the contrary, where a spirit of religion prevails, what a placid serenity does it diffuse over the mind, to behold a whole neighbourhood of people uniting, as it were, in a bond of brotherly love and affection, and all in clean, neat, and decent apparel, resorting from every quarter of their parish to the House of God, in order to offer up their devotions to their common Father in heaven, and to declare their faith in, and dependence for salvation upon, their common Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Also, what beneficial effects must it have on society in general, thus publicly and weekly to assemble for the pious purpose of worshipping our Almighty Creator, in whom *we live, and move, and have our being.*‡ Considered with regard to the principles on which it is established, how great a tendency must such a practice have to unite mankind as brethren, and to promote amongst them mutual offices of kindness, humanity, and love!

The intervals of public worship, too, when employed as the Bible directs, contribute much to render us easy, tranquil, and happy. Instead of drunkenness, gaming, card-playing, and other idle and disorderly recreations, which the irreligious part of mankind, in their leisure moments, are apt to engage in on the Lord's day, we observe the devout Christian, after the hours of public worship are over, applying himself to reading, to meditation, to prayer, and to improving and useful company and conversation,—all which naturally tend to harmonize the affections, and to produce in the mind *a peace which passeth all understanding.*

Thus far I have set before you the happy tendency of the first four commandments of the decalogue, which teach us our duty to God: I now proceed to a consideration of the remaining six, which set forth our obligations to our fellow-creatures. The first of these is the

V Fifth commandment, which enjoins us to honour our father and mother, that is, to love, reverence, and obey them. And what peace or happiness can we expect to see amongst mankind without a cordial and conscientious regard to this amiable precept? Indeed the violation of it is

so

so unnatural and odious a crime, that scarcely can we conceive any thing more shocking than disobedience and want of affection in children towards their parents, even towards those to whom, under God, they owe their very existence, and who are ever ready to sacrifice their own ease and comfort to the advantage and prosperity of their offspring. He, therefore, that is capable of despising the advice and admonition of a parent who is thus solicitous for his real welfare, and who hath toiled, and felt, and wept for him, is a monster of ingratitude,—a monster in nature with whom we should think it unsafe to associate, and whose existence, indeed, would scarcely seem credible, did not instances of it but too frequently occur.

To be convinced of the temporal advantage of obeying the precept under consideration, we need but reflect on the harmony in families—on the mutual comfort and mutual happiness they enjoy—in consequence of a due observance of this command. What can more gladden the heart of a parent than the respectful and attentive behaviour of a dutiful and obedient child ! What comfort so solacing to declining years as the affectionate and assiduous regard of a virtuous and pious offspring !

On the other hand, what heart-felt satisfaction must that child experience, who is conscious to himself, that in no one instance has he refused to listen to the salutary instructions of a father or a mother deeply anxious to promote his well-being ; that whenever necessity has required, he hath been solicitously careful to supply the wants, to mitigate the infirmities, to sooth the sorrows, of a parent labouring under the pressure of any of the numerous evils of life ; and that during the frigid season of old age, he hath tenderly supported the tottering and enfeebled steps of those who, with the utmost solicitude, watched over his helpless infancy, and it may be, toiled early and late to procure him a sustenance, until such time as he was able to procure it for himself ! Happy the child who has thus contributed to render the evening of life calm, mild, and serene to the aged and venerable pair to whom he owes a debt of gratitude too immense ever to be fully discharged !

Now, besides the blessing of long life promised in this commandment to affectionate and obedient children, and which, perhaps, (as attentive observation might probably evince) is generally conferred on those who have been eminent for filial piety ;—besides this, I say, the reflection of having acted in the manner described above towards our parents, must, at every future period of life, afford to the dutiful child, a truly genuine and ineffable pleasure ;—and the more so, as such may reasonably hope, that, should he ever become a parent, his own children, in their turn, will prove a comfort and a blessing to himself.

VI. Of all the black and numerous train of vices that unhappily infest the world, *murder*, which is the crime forbidden by the sixth commandment, is, by far, the most shocking and horrid. The love of life is so inherent in the human breast, and the privation of it so abhorrent from our nature, that whatever threatens its destruction appears to us in the most alarming view. The infliction of pain, too, and often, of the most excruciating torments, with which the cruel act of destroying life, is generally accompanied, tends further to make us abhor the violation of this precept.

Nothing would appear more terrible to most of us than the sudden and unexpected information, that, in a little time, and by a violent means, we were to be deprived of vital existence. Such news would be apt to affect us with the most freezing horror, and to congeal, as it were, the very blood in our veins. We may suppose the case of a condemned criminal. How does it rend the heart of the unhappy culprit to hear the dreadful sentence pronounced upon him! With what mournful accents does he bitterly lament his hapless fate, and in the most forcible and moving language, implore for mercy, and entreat only to spare the life of a wretch, who will cheerfully submit to whatever other punishment it may be deemed necessary to inflict upon him!

Every moral precept of the Bible seems, indeed, so well calculated to preserve our present state of existence to its greatest natural duration, and thereby to promote and prolong our happiness, that whatever has the most distant tendency to render our life uncomfortable, or to deprive us of it, is strictly forbidden. The practice of every vice, therefore, that may injure our health, and by that means, shorten our period of existence in this world, is prohibited by the law of God.

There are, however, instances in which we may be said to be afflicted by Providence, or deprived of present pleasure; but these are such as are permitted only in order to punish us for our sins, and in the end to do us good. Indeed, such is the connection which the Almighty hath established between guilt and misery, that this kind of suffering is the natural, and generally the unavoidable, consequence of a deviation from the divine law: and in such cases, we ought to consider that, in thus afflicting us, it is the benevolent design of Heaven to induce us to forsake our evil ways, and thereby, to render us happy. *God*, we are told, *does not willingly grieve or afflict the children of men*. His chastisements, therefore, are to be considered as providential mercies—as instances of his love, and are evidently intended to save us from what would be infinitely greater punishment, namely, the fatal consequences of a perseverance in iniquity. As a kind father, with a design

to reform his children, corrects them when they do amiss, so the Father of mercies corrects the children of men, and visits them with afflictive dispensations, in order to induce them to forsake the error of their ways, and thus to save them from eternal punishment ; and perhaps, too, from many severer temporal evils, and often from an untimely end, which might otherwise have befallen them. Accordingly, we are told that *whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.** And in another portion of Scripture the Almighty is said *to chasten us that we may be partakers of his holiness.*†

In a word, it must be evident to every intelligent and impartial peruser of the Bible, the religion of which breathes throughout such a spirit of benevolence and love, that one intention of the great Father of all by it, is to promote good-will and friendship amongst his creatures, and thereby to prevent broils, quarrels, and fightings, by which the life of man is always endangered, and often destroyed. But I am now afraid that before I have done, I shall be trespassing on your time, and shall therefore hasten to the consideration of the

VII. Seventh commandment, which is the next in order, and which, like the rest, when duly observed, must greatly conduce not only to the preservation, but to the increase, of domestic and social peace and happiness. This will be manifest from reflecting on the sad consequences that frequently ensue from the breach of this precept.

And to make you sensible of these consequences, or of the temporal evils that are, in general, the bitter fruits of *adultery* (which is the subject of the prohibition in this command,) you need only look abroad into the world, and view its baleful effects,

In the first place, when either one or both of the offending parties are married. For in this case, what misery in families has the sin of adultery produced ! The once amiable pair, who were happy in themselves, happy in a lovely offspring, and who, perhaps, dispensed happiness to many around them, have been rendered completely and superlatively wretched by the ensnaring demeanour of an insinuating strumpet, or the artful and too successful attempts of a designing debauchee. Even murder itself has not unfrequently been the consequence of the infringement of this law of the Decalogue.

This precept, in the next place, forbids *fornication*, or such intercourse and connection betwixt single persons of both sexes as is consistent only
with

* Prov. iii. 12. † Heb. xii. 10.

with a state of marriage. But alas! in innumerable instances is the divine law, in this respect, broken down and trodden under foot. Almost every neighbourhood will furnish us with examples, which but too truly confirm the truth of this remark. And it is evident also that on such unhappy occasions, the female character, more especially, is materially blemished. For she, who is known to have once forfeited her chastity, is generally left, ever after, to pine out a solitary life of neglect and contempt. The author of her misfortune, however, is certainly, of the two, the more criminal in the sight of God and of all good men; though the world is but too apt, ungenerously, to place the chief reproach on the weaker sex. What satisfaction, however, such ravagers of female honour may enjoy, can only be momentary. Shame, and contempt, and bitter remorse, must, on the whole, be the inevitable fruits of such forbidden pleasure.

VIII. In the eighth commandment we are taught not to steal; that is, we are not, either openly, or secretly and without his knowledge, to seize upon the goods of our neighbour, and appropriate them to our own use. Neither are we by fraud, or by any other sinister means, to deprive him of any part of his property, however small that part may be. Also, when we withhold from one another what in reason and in justice is due, we may be said to violate this commandment.

Now in these, and in all other instances of transgressing the divine precept which we are now considering, it is very evident that the peace of society is disturbed and broken, and people are deprived, in part at least, of their means of subsistence. Were such violations, therefore, to become general, mankind must be reduced to the hard necessity of continually waging war with one another in order to protect or to rescue their property, as is the case with many savage tribes of the earth, upon whom the *Sun of Righteousness* has not yet arisen and illuminated by the light of his Sacred Word. On this account, every nation on the Globe where the Bible has been introduced, has, in conformity to the divine law, taken care to guard the property of its individual members by the enactment of laws, sanctioned and enforced by the denunciation of punishment proportioned to the magnitude of the offence, or the demerit of the offender.

IX The ninth commandment forbids us to insinuate or propagate falsehoods of any kind concerning our neighbour. It prohibits all lying, tattling, tale-bearing;—also, all false swearing, or testifying concerning one another, either in a court of justice or elsewhere, what we know to be void of veracity, or what we do not know to be strictly true.

Now,

Now, when we act thus towards a fellow-creature, we certainly do him a piece of very great injustice. We occasion his character which hitherto was unblemished, to be called in question by the world, and thereby lessen, or totally destroy, the good opinion mankind had entertained of him. And this, again, must not only be a matter of grief and pain to himself, but must also prevent his doing all the good to those around him, which he might otherwise have done by his advice and example, deriving authority and weight from a fair and unfulfilled reputation.

When people are thus guilty of spreading malevolent whispers and aspersions concerning one another, they evidently discover a spirit diametrically opposite to that of charity and benevolence, so much recommended throughout the Bible. And hence must ensue animosities, quarrels, and strife, so teasing and so tormenting to mankind.

Besides, he who transgresses this commandment in any of the aforementioned instances, must, if he has any feeling of conscience remaining, experience at times considerable uneasiness. A tormentor, created by himself, will reside within his breast. His conscience will frequently fly in his face, and upbraid him with having despoiled his neighbour of his good name, a property accounted by many more sacred than any earthly possession whatever; nay, even than life itself. The present advantage therefore resulting from a due attention to this precept is clearly manifest.

X. In the tenth commandment we are forbidden to covet the goods of our neighbour; that is, we are prohibited all immoderate and unlawful desires of possessing one another's property. And that this prohibition is intended to promote our present tranquillity will be sufficiently evident, if we consider that covetousness is a very uneasy and tormenting passion. An immoderate desire to possess that which belongs to another, especially when it is contrary to his inclination to part with it, and when, on that account, there is but little reason to expect that that desire can ever be gratified, frequently agitates the mind of the *covetous whom the Lord abhorreth*,* with the most uneasy sensations. And hence, while he is not able to compass the object of his ardent wishes, he becomes his own tormentor.

But should the envious and selfish desires of the covetous person so far gain the ascendancy over him, as to prompt him, contrary to all reason and justice, violently to invade the possessions of another; and should he, moreover, be successful in his rapacious attempts, and be able to wrest from his neighbour that property to which he has no sort of right;—though, in this case, he
himself

* Psalm x. 3.

himself may enjoy a sort of temporary gratification, so far as the mind of a bad man can do so, yet the person whom he has thus circumvented and injured must, no doubt, feel some degree of uneasiness, though it may by no means be the uneasiness of guilt.

Hence you see that covetousness, or an unjust and violent inclination to possess what belongs to another, is a vice which always torments the person who harbours that passion in his breast; and which also, in some cases at least, renders uneasy the person whose property is coveted.

To corroborate and confirm the justness of these observations on the Decalogue, I shall further lay before you a few, and but a very few, of the other moral precepts and maxims of the Old Testament; since to enumerate the whole contained in that Sacred Book would be an endless, and, probably, to many of you, a needless task. Texts of Scripture to this purpose, will readily offer themselves to the recollection of every one who is conversant in Holy Writ.

Consider then the following, all eminently adapted to promote the true pleasure, peace, and happiness of rational creatures. *If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury*—Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.—When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest;—thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God. Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord. Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him. Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among my people. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Ye shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord. Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face*
of

* Exod. xxii 25.—xxiii. 1.

of the old man, and fear thy God. The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born amongst you, and thou shalt love him as thyself, § That which is altogether just thou shalt follow.* Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them, thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother. And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not; then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again. In like manner shalt thou do with his ass, and so shalt thou do with his raiment, and with all lest things of thy brother's, which he hath lost, and thou hast found shalt thou do likewise. Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way and hide thyself from them; thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.—He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.† Cease from anger and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.‡ Defend the poor and the fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.—Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity:—My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother. If sinners entice thee consent thou not.¶ Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away.—The hand of the diligent maketh rich.—Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.—Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.—Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. The hoary head is a crown of glory if it be found in the way of righteousness.—The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water; therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord.—A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.—It is an honour
for

§ Lev. xix. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18. 30. 32. 34.

* Deut. xvi. 20.—xxii. 1, 2, 3, 4. | † 2 Sam. xxiii. 3.

‡ Psalm xxxvii. 8.—lxxxii. 3, 4.—cxxxiii. 1.

¶ Prov. i. 8. 10.—vi. 32.—x. 4.—xii. 22.—xiv. 34.—xvi. 5. 31.—xvii. 14, 15.—xix. 5. 11.

for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.—To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.—Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.—The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.—Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not.—He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.—Remove far from me vanity and lies, give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of God in vain.—Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless; plead for the widow.† Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink, and continue until night till wine inflame them.—Be not proud.‡ Return ye every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.—Thus saith the Lord, Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work.—Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also.§ Let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.¶ Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother. Let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.‖

Having thus gone over the ten commandments, as well as laid before you a few other moral texts of Scripture selected from the Old Testament in the order of the several books, and of the like import as the former, I shall reserve what I have to say respecting the morality of the New Testament, and the consideration of some other useful matters till a future opportunity. In the mean time, from what has already been said, you must be convinced that these commandments are all *holy, just, and good*;

xx. 3.—xxi. 3.—xxii. 6.—xxiii. 21.—xxvii. 10.—xxviii. 20.—xxx. 8, 9.

† Isa. i. 16, 17.—v. 11. | ‡ Jer. xiii. 15.—xviii. 11.—xxii. 3. 13.

§ Hab. ii. 15. | ¶ Zech. vii. 10. | ‖ Mal. ii. 10. 15.

*good;**—that *in keeping of them there is great reward;†*—yea, that they tend to promote the happiness of the world above any human institution whatever; and that, therefore, were they universally obeyed, universal tranquillity would be diffused over the face of the earth. *More, on this account, are they to be desired than gold; yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey comb.‡*

Consider, then, how much you must be your own enemy, and the enemy of mankind by living in disobedience to the divine law; and, on the contrary, how greatly you would advance your own present welfare, and that of those around you, were you studious to obey the precepts of the Bible.

Having suggested this important consideration to your minds, I take leave for the present with supplicating the Divine blessing on the words that have been spoken: may they make a deep and lasting impression on the hearts of all who hear me, and induce every one to *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.¶* God grant this for Jesus Christ's sake, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever. Amen.

* Rom. vii. 12. | † Psalm xix. 11. | § Psalm xix. 10. | ¶ Luke i. 9.

S E R M O N II.

PROVERBS, III. 17.

HER WAYS ARE WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS, AND ALL HER PATHS
ARE PEACE.

IN confirmation of the important truth contained in these words, I have already attempted to lay before you the several advantages naturally flowing from a regulation of our outward conduct according to the precepts of the moral Law of Moses; or rather, of that Law which was delivered by the Great Jehovah to the hands of *his servant Moses*, who was enjoined to promulgate the same amongst the children of Israel, for their benefit, and for the benefit of all future ages.

What effect the arguments, which were then adduced for the purpose of illustrating these advantages, had upon your minds, is best known to yourselves. To me it would appear, that no great mental exertions are necessary in order to be able to perceive the happy effects of a moral and religious life. These effects are indeed so obvious, that barely the mention of them, by bringing them to our recollection, might seem sufficient, not only to convince us of their reality, but moreover to recommend the exercise of religious duties to our most serious regard. Should, however, our own experience in *the right ways of the Lord* have, unhappily, been hitherto so defective as to fail to persuade us of the usefulness and excellency of practical religion, we may be made sufficiently sensible of its blissful consequences, by only adverting to the composed and tranquil lives of those around us, whose conduct has been uniformly under the guidance of religious principles.

But, however manifest the temporal advantages resulting from a life of religion may be, it is very evident that, in the present state of our nature, we all of us have occasion to be repeatedly reminded of our duty as Christians; and therefore, it seems by no means unnecessary frequently to have the moral obligations of Scripture inculcated upon us, and their beneficial effects recalled to our minds.

The facility, therefore, of comprehending the subject, added to the consideration of its great importance, induces me to hope I shall again be favoured by you with a suitable degree of attention, while, in the following discourse, I endeavour to shew that the tendency of the moral precepts of the New Testament is no less, but on the contrary would seem rather more, conducive to the temporal happiness of mankind than the morality of the Old Testament. And after I have thus briefly illustrated the advantages of obeying the Gospel precepts, I shall conclude with an observation or two suited to the subject in hand.

If we consider attentively the Rules which the Scriptures give us for the regulation of our lives, we shall find that the precepts of the Gospel, though of the same import as those of the Law, do yet, in many instances, go even further in recommending such a temper and conduct as are eminently fitted both for individual and for social happiness. Considered as a comment upon, and an illustration of, the Mosaic moral Law, they exhibit that Law in a still more amiable, engaging, and useful point of view ;—representing its benign influence as extending both to the outward and the inward man, and as no less applicable to the whole Gentile world than to the Jewish nation.

On this account, then, the laws of the Gospel would at least appear to claim the superiority in the following respects :—They embrace a larger sphere (even the whole world) for the exercise of the purest and most disinterested benevolence, and its concomitant virtue—active beneficence. Of a sublimer, more refined, and more spiritual nature than the morality of the Old Testament, they seem better adapted to reach the heart, and thereby to produce a more voluntary and sincere obedience. In preference to the Law delivered from Mount Sinai, they recommend more ardently, both towards God and towards man, that spirit of Love which is *the fulfilling of the Law*, and the true criterion of genuine Christianity.

Hence it appears that the moral precepts of the New Testament, as was observed above, are, if possible, still more calculated than those of the Old, to promote whatever can render our present state of existence easy, comfortable and happy. The latter, indeed, seem to have been wisely adapted for the infancy of the world ; the former, for the world in its maturer age and more advanced state of improvement. In a word, the tenor of the Gospel morality perfectly corresponds with the great and benevolent design of the Author of our Holy Religion, who came on an errand of love the most important to the world that could possibly be conceived ; namely, to recover man from that state of guilt and wretchedness into which he had fallen in consequence of his disobedience to the Divine Law.

Our Saviour, in the beginning of his sermon on the Mount, pronounces a blessing on the humble, the meek, the righteous, the merciful, the pure in heart, and on the peace-makers. And, certainly, there is no need of arguments to prove that each of these amiable characters, is not a little rewarded and blessed, even during the present life, in the approbation of a good conscience, and in the esteem of all good men;—yea, in the esteem of those who, though they may not be persuaded to imitate their conduct, yet cannot help inwardly reverencing them.—But perhaps it will be more to our purpose, to consider, separately and apart, the chief of the moral virtues recommended to our attention and practice in the New Testament. And

1. Love or Benevolence is a temper so essential to Christianity, that our Lord commands us to love even our enemies; that is, to grieve at their perseverance in sin, to wish and pray and labour for their reformation, and to rejoice, like the angels of God, at the return of every sinner. He further observes, *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.** So that, by the way, you see we cannot be true Christians, or genuine disciples of Jesus Christ, except we love one another. His Apostles, too, command us *to be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love;†—to owe no man any thing, but to love one another;‡—to love one another with a pure heart fervently;§—to love as brethren.¶* And the following is the prayer of the great Apostle of the Gentiles: *The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men.||*

What, then, should we naturally expect as the fruits of this truly useful and amiable disposition of mind—this universal benevolence? Every thing, certainly, that can benefit the human race. Yea, so comprehensive, and of so great utility is this divine temper, that it seems to concentrate within itself all other virtuous principles, and to be the source whence every humane and friendly exertion proceeds. If we really *loved our neighbour as ourselves*, would we ever act so inconsistently with the affection we profess to bear to him as to injure him in any respect whatever? Undoubtedly, not. On the contrary, we should be invariably disposed to do him all the kind offices in our power: And therefore,

2. As a natural effect of this benevolent spirit we are enjoined in the Gospel, to practise Beneficence, that is, to do good one to another. Give

* John xiii. 35. | † Rom. xii. 10. | ‡ Rom. xiii. 2. | § 1 Pet. i. 22.

¶ 1 Pet. iii. 8. | || 1 Thess. iii. 12.

to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away, says our blessed Lord,† Be not overcome of evil, says St. Paul, but overcome evil with good.‡ As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.§ To do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.¶ St. Peter also advises, Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.‖

These moral precepts of Scripture need no comment. Their beneficial tendency must be obvious to the most ordinary capacities; and it will scarcely be denied, even by the most strenuous advocates for Deism, that from the uniform practice of such Christian duties must arise a very considerable degree of human felicity.

3. But, as another effect of this generous and charitable disposition—this *good will toward men*, we are further commanded to benefit our fellow-creatures by reproof, by admonition, by instruction, by example, &c. And nothing, certainly, can be more friendly to the interests of humanity,—nothing more preclude human misery, or promote in a greater degree the happiness of the world, than in this way, to exert our beneficence towards those who are in ignorance and error; and who, in the language of Scripture, may be said to be—*wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*.

It will readily be allowed by every one in the least acquainted with the deplorable state of human nature when without instruction, and when destitute of all sense of religion, that one of the greatest acts of charity we can practise, is to inform and instruct the ignorant, and to reclaim the vicious from the error of their way. Now this, in concurrence with the Divine blessing, may in general be effected by carefully teaching and explaining to them the chief doctrines of Christianity, by earnestly inculcating the practice of the duties it enjoins, and by setting before them the dreadful consequences even in this life generally arising from inattention to the divine precepts, or in persisting to do what the Scriptures forbid. Also, further to promote this salutary end, we ought to remind them of the comfort, happiness, and pleasure naturally resulting from a virtuous course of life, or a life framed according to the directions of the Bible. And, lastly, it may be observed

† Matt. v. 42. | ‡ Rom. xii. 21. | § Gal. vi. 10. | ¶ Heb. xiii. 16.

‖ I Pet. iv. 9, 10.

observed to such, that for the truth of all we wish to recommend to them we need only appeal to the experience of any one who has lived some time in the world, and who, if he chuses to speak ingenuously, will readily admit that virtue invariably leads to happiness, but vice as certainly to misery.

Correspondent to the foregoing observations are the following texts of Scripture. *Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.—Let no man put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way.—I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.—Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying.—Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another.—Be thou an example in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.—Have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.**

4. Justice or Equity is also a chief branch of the morality of the New Testament. Our Saviour tells us in the following comprehensive sentence.—*All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets; that is,—Conduct yourself in every respect towards all men exactly in the same just and reasonable manner you would wish them to behave towards you, were they in your circumstances, and you in theirs; for this is the sum and substance of what the moral Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament teach with regard to your duty one towards another.—And never, certainly, was there a precept so extensively useful as this. It applies alike to all ranks of men, and would undoubtedly benefit all, were all disposed to obey it. The practice of it, indeed, is of so great and general utility, and the violation of it so frequently attended with numberless ill consequences, that we need not hesitate to affirm, that in attention to this *Golden Rule* is productive of many of the evils of the present life; and that, on the other hand, were it universally obeyed, this world we inhabit would become a sort of heaven upon earth. Natural evil might, indeed, still remain among us, but moral evil would, in a great measure, be banished out of the world. And hence, the sum of human happiness would be nearly as great as it is possible to be in this our first and inferior state of existence.*

Our

* Matt. xxviii. 20.—Rom. xiv. 13.—Rom. xv. 14.—Eph. iv. 22.—

1 Thess. v. 11.—1 Tim. iv. 12.—Heb. v. 2.

Our blessed Lord further advises to *do violence to no man, neither to accuse any falsely.** And by St. Paul we are commanded to *render to all their dues, tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honour, to whom honour.†* Also, in another place, the same Apostle says, *We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness.‡* Again, *Let him that stole steal no more,* Lastly, *Let no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter.§*

Now, it is scarcely necessary to remark, that these texts of Scripture with many others of the like nature that might be selected from the New Testament, evidently recommend nothing but what, in the highest degree, is beneficial to every order of men.

5. Respecting the forgiveness of injuries, which is likewise an essential property of the religion of Jesus Christ, he himself directs us in these words—*If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.¶* To the same purpose the Apostle St. Paul advises—*Recompense to no man evil for evil. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath.‖ Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. §§*

It may here be observed, that the godlike disposition of mind necessarily required for the devout practice of these precepts which command us to forgive the injuries of our fellow-men, appears in a most amiable and engaging point of view, when contrasted with the malignant and infernal spirit of revenge, to which man, in general, is but too much addicted when his passions are unrestrained and uninfluenced by Christian principles. None of the moral virtues, indeed, seems better adapted than this to conciliate the affections of those who may have offended us, and thereby to induce such of them as have any sense of ingenuous shame, to acknowledge their offences. It will moreover incline them to make reparation for such offences, as far as is in their power; and also to take every possible care to avoid the commission of the like wrongs for the time to come. And all this, it is plain, must contribute much to promote mutual good-will and happiness amongst mankind.

6. Let

* Luke iii. 14. | † Rom. xiii. 7. | ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 2. | § 1 Thess. iv. 6.

¶ Luke xvii. 3, 4. | ‖ Rom. xii. 17, 19. | §§ Eph. iv. 32.

6. Let us next consider Almsgiving which is another duty strictly enjoined in the Gospel. Take the following texts of Scripture to this purpose—*Give alms of such things as ye have.—Charge them that are rich in this world, —that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.—If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food ; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled ; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?—Who so hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ?**

It must be evident to every one that a conscientious performance of the duty recommended in these portions of Scripture I have now read to you, would greatly conduce to alleviate the sorrows of our indigent and suffering brethren : and it is no less certain that the act of relieving the wants and necessities of the poor communicates to a generous and benevolent mind, a most refined and exquisite pleasure. In this case, as in most others, virtue is its own reward. And hence is manifest the *present* advantage, both to rich and to poor, of bestowing a portion of our superfluous substance on the distressed part of the community.

7. Amongst the many moral obligations inculcated throughout the New Testament the relative duties of life are not the least important ;—they, therefore, claim our next consideration.

Our own experience will teach us that, in the present imperfect state of human nature, unless a proper subordination in society is established and maintained, and the reciprocal duties of those *in* authority, and those *under* authority, duly observed, there can be no sort of security amongst us either of life or of property. Nor can either high or low hope to enjoy that tranquillity and peace which generally result from all the different members, in a well-regulated society, acting their respective parts in a proper, orderly, and becoming manner.

None, therefore, can be so ignorant as not to know that wherever the peculiar duties of the several orders in social life are neglected, or their respective rights violated, confusion, disorder, and anarchy must ensue. That regularity and beauty which we observe to proceed from a due performance of the several obligations incumbent on each particular class of men,

we

* Luke xi. 41.—1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.—James ii. 15, 16.—1 John iii. 17.

we no longer behold when the superior invades and tramples under foot the peculiar privileges of the inferior : and the inferior, on the other hand, contemns and disregards the authority, and perhaps usurps the office, of the superior. Let us all therefore remember, that an unremitting attention to discharge the respective and appropriate duties of the station in society in which we are severally placed, must greatly tend, not only to promote our individual felicity, but also to ensure the harmony, the beauty, the order, the happiness of the world.

And what reason and experience thus declare as unalterably true, the precepts of the New Testament abundantly confirm. Of this you will no doubt be convinced from the following citations. *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands.* Men ought to love their wives as their own bodies : he that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it.—Ye husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel.—Let every one of you in particular so love his wife as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.†*

Children, obey your parents in the Lord : for this is right.‡ Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath : but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.§

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters, according to the flesh ; —not with eye service, as men-pleasers ; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.—Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear ; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.¶—Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal knowing that ye also have a master in heaven.||

*Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's.—Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates.—Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake : whether it be to the king, as supreme ; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. Honour the king.***

W:

* Eph. v. 22. | † Eph. v. 28.—I Pet. iii. 7.—Eph. v. 33. | ‡ Eph. vi. 1.

§ Eph. vi. 4. | ¶ Eph. vi. 5, 6.—I Pet. ii. 13. | || Col. iv. 1.

** Mat. xxii. 21.—Titus iii. 1.—I Pet. ii. 13, 14. 17.

We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you; and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.—Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.—Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy and not with grief.—The Lord hath ordained, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.—The labourer is worthy of his reward. The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves.—Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine;—in all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works, in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.—A Bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate.†*

8. What we have hitherto been considering are chiefly the social duties, or those duties which one man owes to another; let us now bestow a few thoughts on what we owe to ourselves, considered as individuals. The social and personal duties do, indeed, so co-incide and run into each other, that he who practises the latter cannot in many instances, omit or neglect the former; because the inconveniences which flow from the breach of what we owe to ourselves, do often, either less or more, affect those with whom we are in any manner connected. A person, for instance, who is addicted to drunkenness, not only thereby brings misery upon himself, but what is still more deplorable, he perhaps involves a numerous and helpless family in all the inconveniences attendant on a state of penury and want. Besides this, the presence and usual behaviour of the drunkard must be extremely disagreeable and disgusting to every person of sobriety and decency.

The same observations will apply to other personal vices, such as pride, wrath, malice, envy, discontent, idleness, &c. all which are in some degree their own tormentors, and generally extend their malignant influence to those with whom the person who indulges them has any concerns. I shall,

F

therefore,

* 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.—1 Tim. v. 17.—Heb. xiii. 17.—1 Cor. ix. 14.—

1 Tim. v. 18. | † 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.—2 Tim. iv. 2.—Titus ii. 7, 8.—Titus i. 7, 8.

therefore, proceed to set before you such passages of Sacred Writ as may seem conducive to dissuade you from the practice of such vices. Consider then the following:—*Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*—*Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life.*—*Be not slothful in business.*—*Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.*—*To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*—*Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*—*Labour, working with your hands the thing which is good.*—*Fornication and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you as becometh saints; neither filthiness nor foolish talking, nor jesting which are not convenient.*—*Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess.*—*I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.* Every where, and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.—*I will that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety.*—*Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*—*Keep thyself pure.*—*Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.*—*Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*—*Abstain from fleshly lusts.*—*Be clothed with humility. Be sober, be vigilant.*†

As to treat, particularly, on every distinct species of the Christian morality, would considerably exceed the limits to which I must confine myself in this discourse, I shall only further select from the New Testament the few following moral precepts which, you will observe, are of various utility:—and though they do not seem, properly, to come under any of the foregoing heads, yet it will be allowed, that the due observance of them is well calculated to smooth the rugged path of life and sweeten the intercourse of society; by promoting amongst mankind mutual concessions and civilities,—a peaceable, an obliging, a polite behaviour,—and of course, frequent interchanges of friendly and benevolent offices. Let us attend to them then:

Judge

† Matt. xi. 29.—Luke xxi. 34.—Rom. xii. 11.—Rom. xiii. 13.—I Cor. vii. 2.
—Eph. iv. 26. 28.—Eph. v. 3, 4.—Eph. v. 18.—Phil. iv. 11, 12.—
1 Tim. ii. 9.—1 Tim. iv. 13.—1 Tim. v. 22.—1 Tim. vi. 8.—
James i. 19.—1 Pet. ii. 11.—1 Pet. v. 5. 8.

Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement. — In honour prefer one another. — As much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men. — Now, I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you. — Bear ye one another's burdens. — Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. — Lie not one to another. — Study to be quiet and to do your own business. — Be at peace among yourselves. — Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters. — Speak evil of no man, be no brawler, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. — Honour all men. — Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder, yea, all of you be subject one to another. §

Having thus considered the beneficial effects derived to us in this world from an uniform obedience to the Laws of the Gospel, a brief recapitulation of the whole may not, here, be unuseful.

Would you then, that benevolence should universally possess and actuate the human breast;—that all orders of men, from the highest to the lowest, should, according to their abilities and opportunities, exercise the god-like act of beneficence, and so contribute, by every means in their power, to the happiness of their own species?—Would you wish that neither the insidious arts of fraud and injustice, of defamation and slander, nor the rude hand of violence, should injure mankind in their persons or properties, or in their reputation?—Are you solicitous that none of the evil and malignant passions should occupy and torment the hearts of the sons of men; but rather, that, under the mild and gentle influence of candour and kindness, of meekness and humility, they should ever be disposed to put the most favourable constructions on the language and actions of their brethren; and further, that a spirit of forbearance and moderation—of long suffering and forgiveness towards those that offend, should uniformly regulate the conduct of every individual; and still more,—that a tender, humane, and charitable disposition should, on all occasions, be feelingly alive to relieve human want and human wretchedness?—Are you, moreover, desirous that for the sake of maintaining the peace and good order of the world, as well as promoting the

§ John vii. 24. — Rom. xii. 10. — Rom. xii. 18. — I Cor. i. 10. — Gal. vi. 2. — Phil. ii. 3. — Col. iii. 9. — I Thes. iv. 11. — I Thes. v. 15. — I Tim. v. 2. 2. — Titus iii. 2. — I Pet. ii. 17. — I Pet. v. 5. — See also I Cor. xiii. 4, 5, 6, 7.

the mutual comfort and happiness of society, the several degrees of human beings should preserve their due rank, and conscientiously act their due parts in the community? In a word, do you sincerely wish to be happy in yourself, while here, and to contribute to the happiness of your fellow-creatures; as well as to enjoy the comfortable hope of participating hereafter, in the transcendent joys of the blessed? then—in order to promote and attain all these desirable ends—**BE UNIFORMLY SOLICITOUS YOURSELF TO OBEY THE PRECEPTS OF THE BIBLE, AND EARNESTLY ENDEAVOUR TO EXCITE IN ALL AROUND YOU THE SAME CARE AND CONCERN TO OBEY THEM.** Whatever others may do, see that you henceforth *walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you;** and with faithful Abraham, *command your children and household after you to keep the way of the Lord.†*

I have now finished what I at first proposed, namely, to prove to you that *Religion's ways are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace.* I have endeavoured to shew how the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, your own past experience, and the experience of others—all concur in pointing out the path, in which you ought to walk for the future, in order to secure to yourselves as large a portion of human happiness as is attainable in this fleeting and transitory state. Owing, indeed, to the weakness and frailty of our nature, untoward incidents, which no human foresight can perceive, nor, if perceived, any human power avert, will frequently occur in this chequered scene of things, and in some degree at least, interrupt our tranquillity here. But these we ought to consider as wisely intended by a benign and merciful Providence to wean our affections from *this present world*, and to induce us to fix them on *that which is to come*, where the happiness of the righteous will be not only inexpressibly great and glorious, but moreover, without interruption and without end. It is however certain that such occasional infelicity is often greatly aggravated by our own imprudence and misconduct; and how much might it generally be alleviated by a seasonable exertion of that spirit of benevolence towards our suffering brethren, so earnestly recommended in almost every page of Scripture!

Were only that Rule of our blessed Lord, of doing to others as we wish them, on a mutual change of circumstances, to do to us, universally observed, the present state of mankind, as was observed before, would be infinitely bettered. Influenced by a regard to this precept, the rich would not condemn or overlook the poor, because they themselves in any circumstances however low, yet connected with innocence, would not chuse, and would

consider

consider it as unjust, to be contemned or overlooked. On the contrary, they would cheerfully contribute, as occasions should require, to the supply of the wants of their indigent fellow-creatures ;—would tenderly and feelingly enter into their *unavoidable* straits and difficulties, their sufferings and sorrows, and in consequence, would use the proper means to relieve and to comfort them.

On the other hand, the poor, actuated by a due concern to obey this excellent Rule of our Lord, (and which would be no other than a due concern to obey the dictates of right reason) would not envy the superior condition of the rich ; because, if rich themselves, they would not wish, and would justly account it unreasonable, to be envied. Neither would the man in the humblest station of life repine at his own obscure rank in society. Convinced from Scripture and experience that various orders of men are absolutely necessary in our present state of existence ;—convinced, also, that God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, and whose *kingdom ruleth over all*, ordereth the lot of every one in such a manner as is most conducive to his real welfare, he would cheerfully acquiesce in his station, and diligently endeavour to discharge its appropriate duties. With what pleasure also might he reflect, that should any unfavourable contingency befall him which it was not in his power to prevent, he would most assuredly receive, (as he in his turn would be willing to grant), such assistance from his more prosperous brethren as should serve to alleviate his present infelicity ! In short, could we all be persuaded constantly and conscientiously to observe such a fair and equitable conduct towards each other as is implied in attention to this universal Rule, we might with truth assert that fraud, injustice, and oppression ; cruelty, robbery, and murder, with almost every other moral evil, would quit our world, and no longer harass and torment mankind.

From all that has been said you must now, I trust, be sufficiently sensible of the great utility of the Scriptures with regard to human life. And from a consideration of their inestimable value and advantage in this respect, I might now proceed to shew how very unreasonably and injuriously to mankind Infidels and Deists act in rejecting the Holy Bible, and in endeavouring to persuade their fellow-men to follow their example, chiefly, as they pretend, because they cannot see of what advantage it is to the world ; nay, more than this, they scruple not to affirm, that it is of real disadvantage to mankind. But as the execution of this, together with the consideration of other matters conducive to our purpose, would, at this time, detain you too long.

I shall

I shall leave off for the present ; and, God willing, shall resume the subject in another discourse.

I cannot, however, finally conclude without warning you against such practices as would naturally induce a belief that you were in any respect influenced by the principles of Deism ; or, in other words, that you were destitute of a lively and practical faith in the Word of God. And whence do you imagine flows every immorality of life, and consequently, most of the misery that befalls us, but from the want of such a faith ? Did we really and sincerely believe the threatenings denounced against sinners in the Bible, would any of us be so daring or so mad as to live in any habitual course of known sin whatever ? Impossible ! Or, if we truly believed that God had commanded us to *sanctify his sabbaths, to reverence his sanctuary, and not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together*, for the purpose of devoutly worshipping him, and improving our souls in virtue and holiness, would so many of us as really do, venture to loiter at home from the *solemn assembly* ; and, instead of doing honour to our Maker in the *Congregation of Saints*, spend his Holy Day in a careless, irreverent and sinful manner ; being thus a disgrace and a dishonour to the Religion we profess ? Certainly, not. On this account, then, it is but too evident that Deism, or something still worse, is more prevalent amongst us than we seem to be aware of. And hence arises, as was just now observed, most of the present infelicity and wretchedness that many of us daily and hourly experience.

On the other hand, I flatter myself that those of you, who have been so happy as really to make the rules of Scripture your guide, are ready, in the words of part of the chapter whence the text is taken, to declare from happy experience that, with respect to the religion of your Bible, *the gain thereof is better than fine Gold. She is more precious than rubies ; and all the things you can desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her.**

Being thus convinced of the blissful tendency of the Scriptures, let us all, through the help which the Almighty affords us, and as we value our present and future well-being, take especial care, that we fail not to perform whatever duties these inspired Writings enjoin.

In

* Prov. iii. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

In fine, *Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*† And may the Divine Spirit assist us not only to *think* on them, but also conscientiously and devoutly to *practise* them. And then shall we *experimentally* know, that *Religion's ways are, indeed, ways of PLEASANTNESS, and that all her paths are* PEACE.

† Phil. iv. 8.

SERMON III.

S E R M O N III.

1 TIMOTHY, IV. 8.

GODLINESS IS PROFITABLE UNTO ALL THINGS, HAVING PROMISE
OF THE LIFE THAT NOW IS, AND OF THAT WHICH IS TO COME.

IN two former discourses from a different text, I endeavoured to shew how the uniform practice of the moral precepts of the Old and New Testament leads to the substantial enjoyment of peace, tranquillity, and pleasure in this lower world.

From the arguments that were then advanced for this purpose, I trust that most of you are, by this time, thoroughly convinced how greatly conducive the morality of your Bibles is to your best temporal interests. Nay, I am verily persuaded, that amongst all the texts of Scripture which have been produced for your consideration, there is scarcely one which even the Deist himself can reasonably object to:—I say,—reasonably,—for those whose minds are warped by prejudice, or by any other unhappy means, are generally disposed, when it suits their purpose, to find fault with the plainest dictates of Reason, of Conscience, or of Common Sense. Whatever sentiments seem, in the smallest degree, to oppose the system of opinions they have adopted, they will not scruple to condemn as irrational, mischievous and absurd; though every one else should clearly see the reasonableness and useful tendency of such sentiments.

In the following discourse, after having premised an observation or two on the open and daring attacks that have lately been made, by the enemies of our Holy Religion, on the authority and credit of the Scriptures, and having also mentioned what appears to me one principal cause of such attacks, my intention is to shew that the moral precepts of the Bible, so far from their being repugnant to Reason (as Deists affirm) are, on the contrary, in perfect harmony with that distinguishing excellence of our nature. And hence you will be sensible of the consequent unreasonableness and absurdity of those who, allowing the faculty of reason to be a gift of the Deity, do yet deny the truth and Divine authority of the Inspired Writings; and also,

how

how injuriously they act towards their fellow-men, in endeavouring to persuade them to reject the Bible, which contains, as you have already seen, such an invaluable fund of moral instruction as is to be met with in no other book in the whole world. And, on account of this its superlative worth and excellence, I shall endeavour to urge upon you the necessity of cherishing an esteem and reverence for your Bible, and of paying a due obedience to its precepts, as what will so highly promote your happiness here.

But since the advantages of religion are not confined to this world alone ;—since *Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*, I shall next consider, agreeably to the last clause of these words, this Sacred Book in an infinitely higher and more important view, namely, with regard to a future state. And hence you will be able to perceive how greatly its promises of future felicity conduce to the comfort and consolation of every devout soul—of every sincere believer, in the season of sickness, or at the prospect of dissolution, by inspiring the afflicted or dying Christian with the most lively hope of enjoying for ever an inconceivable happiness in the future world. And hence also will easily be inferred the wretched gloom, or at best, the perplexing doubts, in which the mind of the Infidel or Sceptic must unavoidably be involved at such an awful crisis.

Now, the consideration of these particulars, together with that of some others naturally arising from the subject, will, I flatter myself, not a little tend, through the Divine blessing, to confirm your faith in the Word of God.

Though the benevolent design of the Holy Scriptures must be clearly evident to every impartial and diligent peruser—to every one who will be at pains attentively to consider the affections and tempers they inculcate, and the duties they enjoin ; yet these authentic and invaluable records of antiquity, these sacred stores of heavenly truth, containing a system of the sublimest and most important doctrines, and of the purest morality, have lately been attacked with all the virulence of invective and of mental depravity, by the rashness and temerity of some modern infidels. Such would have you believe that, by pursuing the directions of your Bible, you pursue your own misery. They have represented these holy and inspired Writings, as containing the most glaring absurdities, as abounding with the most palpable falsehoods, and as recommending every species of immorality.

All these weighty charges, however, have happily been most ably refuted

by some friends† of Revelation and of mankind, who have boldly and laudably stood forth in defence of the Scriptures, and produced such arguments in favour of Revealed Religion as cannot fail to convince every unprejudiced mind of the truth of these Sacred Writings. They have done more. Besides adducing the most cogent arguments for the authenticity of the Bible, they have clearly and abundantly exposed to the apprehension of the most ordinary capacities the numerous and scandalous falsehoods with which the productions of these enemies to Revelation, to themselves, and to mankind, do, in almost every page, abound.

And hence it would appear that men, so unhappily prejudiced against the Sacred Volume, have not used such endeavours to *search the Scriptures*, and inform themselves concerning the design of their contents as the great importance of the subject most evidently demands. Determined at any rate to give sentence against the Bible, they appear to have sedulously selected from it such detached passages only as might seem to serve their wretched purpose; but which passages, when taken in connection with the context, often convey a very different meaning from what they would otherwise seem to do.

But, to what cause shall we attribute this unhappy disposition of mind in thus endeavouring to discredit and set aside the Holy Bible, which evidently contains such excellent instructions as, if duly attended to, could not fail to promote, in an eminent degree, the peace and pleasure of mankind? And we may ask this with the greater surprize, when it is considered that to invalidate the credibility of Scripture can answer no good purpose whatever, even to Deists themselves. By thus freeing the human mind from the restraints which Religion would establish, too many will conceive themselves at liberty to indulge without remorse in all manner of licentiousness; and this again will frequently plunge them into the gulph of wretchedness and ruin. It is plain, therefore, that they who thus seek to depreciate the Bible, may be considered as amongst the chief enemies of mankind.

Shall we then ascribe this lamentable prejudice to the grossest, yet most unaccountable, ignorance of Sacred Writ? Or, may it not rather be referred to that unhappy bias of mind, that innate depravity of heart, and proneness to evil, inherent in all the sons of Adam, till their affections are renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God? For, according to these same Scriptures,

our

† See Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible*; a production containing a most able and complete refutation of the many rash, unfounded, and false assertions concerning the Scriptures, advanced by Mr Paine in his *Age of Reason*.

our first parents, by violating a Divine command, contracted a corrupt and sinful nature inclining them to a sinful practice. And this, again, it is to be observed, was entailed on all their posterity.†

Now, it is but too natural and too common for those who are in love with their sins to despise the advice of such as would reclaim them from their vicious courses. And as the Scriptures, in innumerable instances, thwart the propensities and practices of corrupt nature; so those men, especially, who have openly divested themselves of all regard for that reverence which the Christian world, has in general, throughout so many ages, professed for the Bible, and who, at the same time, are engaged in any sinful pursuit, would gladly vindicate their conduct by raising objections against Revealed Religion. A love of sin, therefore, is one principal cause of infidelity. What the transgressor wishes not to be true, because, if true, completely wretched must be his portion hereafter at least, he naturally endeavours to represent as false; thus miserably deceiving himself, and attempting to deceive others, into eternal ruin.

Having thus pointed out what appears to be one chief cause of men's attacking the authority of Revealed Religion, I now proceed to shew the exact harmony that subsists between the dictates of Reason and the moral precepts of the Bible.

Mr Paine, who is a professed Deist, has entitled his deistical performance the *Age of Reason*, from a notion, I suppose, that the rules of Scripture and the voice of Reason are so much at variance, that the latter has hitherto been, in some measure shackled and suppressed by the specious superiority and operative influence of the former; but that the happy period is now arrived in which he has been so fortunate as to detect the imposture with which the world has been so long deceived, and to expose to public view the absurdity of the doctrines of the Bible, and the numerous disadvantages necessarily resulting from obedience to its laws.

Now, should this (as seems most probable) have been the opinion of the Author of the *Age of Reason*, and his motive for disseminating sentiments, which in the end might prove so inimical to human happiness, I would only appeal to the common sense of every one present for the extreme folly and falsehood of such an opinion. After duly reflecting upon what has been before delivered in two former discourses on this subject;—after maturely weighing

† Daily experience and observation incontestably prove what the Scriptures teach concerning the present state of human nature. No indifferent proof this, certainly, of the truth of the doctrines of the Bible!

weighing the arguments in favour of the happy tendency of Revelation which have been deduced from the general sense and experience of mankind, you will, I have no doubt, be thoroughly convinced that the dictates of unperverted Reason, and the moral precepts of Scripture do invariably co-incide; and that so far from their running counter to, they mutually aid and assist, each other. Reason assists in discovering the true meaning of Scripture; and Scripture, on the other hand, improves and conducts aright the operations of Reason, which, without such an infallible guide, would be perpetually liable to error.

The precepts of the Bible are indeed so consonant to what impassionate Reason in general suggests, that even a virtuous Heathen could not but highly approve of them. To such the moral maxims of Revelation and the rules of Reason would appear so exactly to correspond that their harmony would seem peculiarly striking and pleasing.

Amongst the many proofs, therefore, that might be adduced for the truth and Divine authority of the Scriptures, that taken from the manifest agreement between the law of Reason, and the moral law of the Old and New Testament is certainly one of the chief. To convince you of such agreement, compare the morality of your Bible with the suggestions of right Reason; and you must be fully persuaded of their corresponding tendency. Observe that in whatever instances the written law of God condemns your conduct, the law of Reason, if you consult it fairly, condemns it too; and the general
tenor

§ It is allowed that there have been in different ages of the world, instances of Heathens who, without the help of a Revealed Law, have, in a certain degree at least, obeyed *the law written in their hearts*; or, upon the whole, conducted their lives agreeably to the dictates of unprejudiced Reason. But seldom, or perhaps never, has it been observed that those, who have lived in a country favoured with the light of Revelation and yet have publicly rejected it as unnecessary to direct them in their moral conduct, have made that Reason of which they so much boast, a rule by which they regulated their own lives. The Almighty seems to have permitted such to follow the suggestions of their depraved appetites, as a punishment of their unbelief, and at the same time to convince the world how insufficient human Reason alone is to direct us in our general behaviour. Indeed, before the fall of our first parents, the empire of Reason was great, and perhaps, perfectly adequate, while the human heart was yet uninfluenced by any evil propensity, to answer every purpose of morality; but ever since that unhappy event, a Revelation of the will of God to man seems to have become absolutely necessary, in order to direct his wandering steps in the paths of Rectitude.

tenor of action which falls in with the precepts of Revelation, will, also, invariably meet the approbation of Conscience; unless when that faithful Monitor, silenced and hardened through the *deceitfulness of sin* (which, alas! is but too often the case,) ceases to approve even of what is good. Then, indeed, Conscience may be said (in the words of an inverted Scriptural precept) to *refuse the good and chuse the evil*.

Hence you see that the rule of moral action suggested by the natural dictates of the human mind, when free from prejudice and passion, is the same as that delivered in Holy Writ; only we are to observe that the latter, besides revealing infinitely more than the former could ever have discovered, exalts and refines, elucidates and confirms the law of natural conscience; and being, moreover, not liable to error and mistake, like human Reason, establishes beyond doubt or uncertainty the several obligations of moral duty.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, (Chap. ii. 14, 15.) informs us that *when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts*. From the Apostle's assertion in these words, it is plain that he considered those Heathens who conducted their lives according to the light of their dispensation; that is, according to what the law of their own minds, while undepraved by a habit of sinning, suggested as fit and proper to be done, acted upon a law, in all respects similar to the moral law of the Bible. They had no written law expressly revealed from heaven by which they might regulate their conduct; yet when, from the dictates of natural Reason and Conscience, they practised justice, candour, beneficence, and the like duties towards their fellow-men; and observed sobriety, temperance, diligence, &c. in regard to themselves, they were then said to *do by the light of nature the things contained in the law* of Divine revelation; and to shew that *the work of the moral law* of the Bible *was written in their hearts*. And thus it is evident that the law by which they were governed when they did well, though greatly enfeebled and obscured in consequence of the fall, was yet exactly similar to that law which God has revealed to the world, in order to confirm, establish, and enforce, and to preserve from error, the original law of the human mind, which, without the aid of Revelation, is so subject to perversion and abuse.

And since the suggestions of unprejudiced Reason and the practical precepts of Scripture do thus exactly correspond, is it not a most convincing proof that the moral law of the Bible must have proceeded from the same origin as the law of Conscience? Did they in any respect contradict each other, then

then might we have room to conclude that they derive not their existence from the same divine and unerring source.†

Some things, indeed, there are in Scripture *above* the comprehension of human Reason, though they do not at all seem *contrary* to it: but ought we to condemn the mysteries of the Oracles of God as forged and false, because our slender and limited powers cannot penetrate into the depths of eternal Wisdom? By no means. We ought rather with the Apostle to consider that *NOW* we know but *in part*, but hereafter *shall we know even as also we are known*:§—At present our utmost knowledge of things is only partial and imperfect; but in the future world it shall be so increased as in some degree to resemble that of the Supreme Intelligence himself.

But though the tenor of Revelation, and the dictates of sound Reason, do, as we have seen above, invariably co-incide: yet feeble and unavailing must the strength of the latter be when unassisted and uninforced by the precepts and sanctions of the former. The histories of all ages and countries afford a sufficient testimony to the truth of this observation. In whatever parts of the world the Bible has found a reception, we may behold the manners of at least a part of the inhabitants greatly improved, and of course, their condition rendered infinitely more comfortable: though, from want of an universal and unreserved obedience to its precepts, it has not yet by far, had, in any country, that full effect on the morals of men, which it otherwise would have, and which, we are taught to believe, it will, at some future time, have on all the nations of the earth.

It seems, indeed, probable that the happy period will at length arrive, when, in every inhabited part of our Globe, human Reason shall, in consequence of Revelation, be improved and strengthened to such a degree, that all people and nations, assisted by the counsel and guidance of the Spirit of God, shall cordially embrace and obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And then *shall the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.**

Again, we may observe that in most parts of the world where the Holy Scriptures have not been introduced, the human mind is still enveloped in the grossest ignorance and error; and the human conduct, in a most deplorable

† The reader may see this subject clearly illustrated in Bishop Hurd's third and fourth Sermons preached at Lincoln's-Inn, Vol. I. 2nd Ed.

§ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

|

* Isa. xi. 9.

plorable degree, grovelling, base, and cruel †

This Sacred Book is indeed of such mighty consequence to the world that the improvement of mankind in knowledge and civilization, and in every thing else that can render life comfortable and happy ;—the amelioration of Governments, too, in the extension of civil liberty to the governed—may all be traced to this fruitful source of every good. And Thomas Paine

† The following affecting relation is extracted from a Book lately published in London, entitled, “ A Journey from the Prince of Wales’s Fort in Hudson’s Bay to the Northern Ocean. By Samuel Hearne.”—This interesting account exhibits a most melancholy picture of the depraved state of human nature when uninformed and unenlightened by the Scriptures of Truth,—those Scriptures which, when cordially received, effectually eradicate every evil temper of the mind, and render the affections humane, mild, and merciful. It also shews us, in a striking point of view, with how little remorse, nay—with what horrid complacency, the heart of man can perpetrate crimes of the most cruel and savage barbarity, when in a rude and uncultivated state—when, destitute of the Light and Influence of Revelation and having no other guide than Reason, it has devoted itself to the worship of various, inanimate, contemptible, or imaginary beings.

“ At this time (the 16th of July, 1771), it being about noon, the three men who had been sent as spies met us on their return, and informed my companions that five tents of Esquimaux were on the west side of the river. The situation they said was very convenient for surprizing them ; and according to their account, I judged it to be about 12 miles from the place at which we met the spies. When the Indians received this intelligence, no farther attendance or attention was paid to my survey, but their whole thoughts were immediately engaged in planning the best method of attack, and how they might steal on the poor Esquimaux the ensuing night, and kill them all while asleep. To accomplish this bloody design more effectually, the Indians thought it necessary to cross the river as soon as possible. Accordingly, after they had put all their guns, spears, targets, &c. in good order, we crossed the river which took up some time.

“ When we arrived at the west side of the river, each painted the point of his target or shield ; some with the figure of the sun, others with that of the moon, several with different kinds of birds and beasts of prey, and many with the images of imaginary beings, which, according to their silly notions, are the inhabitants of the different elements, Earth, Sea, Air, &c.

“ On enquiring the reason of their doing so, I learned that each man painted his shield with the image of that being on which he relied most for success in the intended engagement. Some were contented with a single representation ; while others,

“ doubtful,

Paine himself, it may be presumed, owes much of the general knowledge he possesses to the happy influence of the Bible on mankind; but, like the ungrateful adder in the fable, he attempts to sting the bosom which has cherished and fed him with the bread of Instruction. His ideas of ONE ALMIGHTY BEING who is the Maker, Supporter, and Governour of all things, are evidently borrowed from the Bible; though, perhaps, he may not

“ doubtful, I suppose, of the quality and power of any single being, had their shields
 “ covered to the very margin with a group of hieroglyphics quite unintelligible to
 “ every one except the painter: and when this piece of superstition was completed, we
 “ began to advance towards the Esquimaux tents.

“ It is perhaps worth remarking, that my crew, though an undisciplined rabble,
 “ and by no means accustomed to war or command, seemingly acted on this horrid
 “ occasion with the utmost uniformity of sentiment. There was not among them the
 “ least altercation or separate opinion, all were united in the general cause, and as
 “ ready to follow where Montanabee led, as he appeared to be ready to lead, ac-
 “ cording to the advice of an old Copper Indian, who had joined us on our first arrival
 “ at the river where this bloody business was first proposed.

“ The number of my crew was so much greater than that which five tents could
 “ contain, and the warlike manner in which they were equipped so greatly superior to
 “ what could be expected of the poor Esquimaux, that no less than a total massacre of
 “ every one of them was likely to be the case, unless Providence should work a miracle
 “ for their deliverance.

“ The land was so situated that we walked under cover of the rocks and hills till we
 “ were within two hundred yards of the tents. There we lay in ambush for some
 “ time, watching the motions of the Esquimaux; and here the Indians would have
 “ advised me to stay till the fight was over, but to this I would by no means consent;
 “ for I considered that when the Esquimaux came to be surprized, they would try
 “ every way to escape, and if they found me alone, not knowing me from an enemy,
 “ they would probably proceed to violence against me when no person was near to
 “ assist. For this reason I determined to accompany them, telling them, at the same
 “ time, that I would not have any hand in the murder they were about to commit,
 “ unless I found it necessary for my own safety.

“ By this time the Indians had prepared themselves for the attack, it was near one
 “ o'clock in the morning of the seventeenth, when finding all the Esquimaux quiet in
 “ their tents, they rushed forth from their ambuscade, and fell on the poor unsuspecting
 “ creatures, unperceived till close at the very eves of their tents when they soon began
 “ the bloody massacre, while I stood neuter in the rear.

not be so ingenuous as to own it. Had Mr Paine been born amongst Heathens who have never yet enjoyed the advantages of Gospel light, he might, like the gross Idolaters of Pagan countries, have at present been a worshipper of some or other contemptible and imaginary deity or deities. And happy, probably, for himself, and for others, too, had this been the case!

H

case!

" In a few seconds the horrible scene commenced, it was shocking beyond description; the poor unhappy victims were surprized in the midst of their sleep, and had neither time nor power to make any resistance: men, women and children, in all upwards of twenty, ran out of their tents stark naked, and endeavoured to make their escape, but the Indians having possession of all the land-side, to no place could they fly for shelter. One alternative only remained, that of jumping into the river: but as none of them attempted it, they all fell a sacrifice to Indian barbarity!

" The shrieks and groans of the poor expiring wretches were truly dreadful; and my horror was much increased at seeing a young girl, seemingly about eighteen years of age killed so near me, that when the first spear was struck into her side she fell down at my feet, and twisted round my legs, so that it was with difficulty that I could disengage myself from her dying grasps. As two Indian men pursued this unfortunate victim, I solicited very hard for her life; but the murderers made no reply till they had struck both their spears through her body, and transfixed her to the ground. And so hardened and so devoid of all feeling were these ruffians that they paid not the smallest regard to the shrieks and agony of the poor wretch who was twining round their spears like an eel! Indeed, after receiving much abusive language from them on the occasion, I was at length obliged to desire that they would be more expeditious in dispatching their victim out of her misery, otherwise I should be obliged, out of pity, to assist in the friendly office of putting an end to the existence of a fellow-creature who was so cruelly wounded. On this request being made, one of the Indians hastily drew his spear from the place where it was first lodged, and pierced it through the breast near the heart. The love of life, however, even in this most miserable state, was so predominant, that though this might justly be called the most merciful act that could be done for the poor creature, it seemed to be unwelcome; for though much exhausted by pain and loss of blood, she made several efforts to ward off the friendly blow. My situation and the terror of mind at beholding this butchery, cannot easily be conceived, much less described; though I summoned up all the fortitude I was master of on the occasion, it was with difficulty that I could refrain from tears; and I am confident that my features must have feelingly expressed how sincerely I was affected at the barbarous scene I then witnessed; even at this hour I cannot reflect on the transactions of that horrid day without shedding tears."

safe! For though, no doubt, he would, in such a situation, have been totally ignorant of many things of which he at present has some knowledge, yet would he, at the same time, have perhaps, been also, infinitely freer from guilt, having lately so unhappily employed his talents in the disparagement of Sacred Writ.*

From what has been said it is evident how much the devout practice of our Holy Religion *has the promise of the life that now is*—how greatly conducive it is to human improvement and to human felicity. Never, indeed, was there a religion in the world so worthy of regard as that of the Bible, because never was there any so beneficent to the miserable sons of men. Of what value are all the religions of the Heathen world when compared with the religion of Jesus Christ, which breathes nothing but *glory to God in the highest,*

* Together with his attempts to depreciate the Bible, Mr Paine seems also heartily disposed to vilify and traduce the character of the Christian priesthood; yet, notwithstanding his efforts for this purpose, I do not hesitate to say, (and I believe every reasonable reflecting person will agree with me) that, if every priest would diligently and conscientiously perform the several most arduous duties of his highly important and honourable profession; and if, at the same time, the people of whom he has the charge, would condescend to follow his advice, the clerical function would be found to be, of all others, the most *useful*. The duty of a clergyman is to explain and inculcate the doctrines and precepts of the Bible, and thereby to persuade men to observe, uniformly, such a temper and conduct, as would not only promote their well-being in this world, but (which is of infinitely more consequence) would ensure their happiness in the world to come. And what character on earth so useful, so sacred, so godlike as this! But it is no wonder that those who disbelieve the Word of God should condemn and despise his ministers. It is a remark of the late Doctor Johnson, who was no priest, that “malevolence to the clergy is seldom at a great distance from irreverence of Religion.”

Neither, again, I presume is it over-rating the usefulness of the clergy to assert, that they have contributed, perhaps as much as any other description of men, to promote the useful arts amongst mankind. Even the present improvements in Agriculture and Manufactures, in Chymistry, Physic, &c. are not a little indebted to their exertions in the pursuit of knowledge and of what may benefit the world. In a word, it must be evident to every intelligent mind, that Science in general owes much of its present advanced state to the liberal and philosophic researches of the Clergy of Great Britain.

highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.‡ Its own intrinsic value carries the stamp of Divinity along with it. The more we study it, the more we must be convinced that it infinitely exceeds all human composition whatever, and that it is indeed and in truth a Revelation from Heaven for our good. The agreement of its several parts communicated to the world at various, and sometimes, at far-distant periods of time;—the account it contains of the wonderful mercies and deliverances experienced by those who have unremittingly *run the way of God's commandments*;§—the reasonable, just, and exemplary punishments exhibited to us, as inflicted upon obstinate offenders, both as a check to themselves, and as a warning to others—all these concur to give us the highest ideas of the Bible, and to recommend it to our most serious attention and regard.

Nay, were this Sacred Volume only a human composition (to which, it must be clear to every discerning person, it is infinitely superior,) it would, notwithstanding, effectually reward our pains in paying the strictest attention to its precepts; since to do so, would be the best method we could adopt in order to promote our well-being here. But when we are sufficiently assured that its authority is divine, every argument in its favour receives additional weight, in proportion as the pleasures of eternity exceed those of time both in degree and duration; or, as the maxims of divine and eternal wisdom excel those of the limited and narrow capacities of human beings.

On all these accounts, then, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament ought to be considered by us as a dispensation of the greatest Love the world ever knew,—exhibiting the Creator of the human race as dispensing to his revolted creatures innumerable mercies and benefits, and every thing besides
that

‡ It is true indeed—and a most lamentable truth it is—that amongst those who profess themselves the followers of Jesus Christ, too many live in a manner diametrically opposite to what the Bible recommends. But though such ill-living Christians have, unhappily, but too great an influence, in bringing a scandal and a reproach upon the Religion of Christ, by which means they strengthen and abet the cause of Infidelity; yet ought it to be candidly considered, that such an evil conduct in Christians so called is by no means to be ascribed to Christianity. It would, indeed, be no difficult matter to prove that all those amongst us, whose general conduct is in any respect derogatory to the honour of God, or injurious to man, have little more of Christianity, either in their temper or conduct, than barely the name.

§ Psal. cxix. 32.

that can conduce to their temporal and eternal good ; on the one hand, alluring them with the promises of happiness both here and hereafter, as a reward of their obedience ; and, on the other hand, setting before them the dreadful consequences of persisting in what both Reason and Religion condemn. Happy, therefore, yea, thrice happy, are the people who can be persuaded cordially to embrace this unparalleled system of Divine truth and moral excellence, and to make its laws the rule and guide of their lives !

Should any who now hear me be disposed to controvert the arguments I have advanced in support of the blissful tendency of Revelation, and to embrace the gloomy doctrines of Infidelity, all I would say to such is this— if you really believe the Religion of the Bible to be inimical to human felicity, then throw off all the salutary restraints it recommends, pursue the bent of your own vicious inclinations, give the reins to your lusts, your passions, your inordinate appetites—all which, you know, the Bible forbids, but in vain, forbids to you.—In this manner, I say, plunge into all the deceitful pleasures of sin, and then await the consequence. I will not deny that you may find a sort of embittered pleasure in a licentious course of life. But how short-lived, even such a pleasure ! Its duration, as the Scriptures assert, (and your own experience will confirm the assertion) is *but for a season* ; yea, and for so very short a season, that when over and past, it will appear on retrospection to have been only momentary, though the bitterness and remorse that follow may not so soon be terminated. Let me, however, remind you that unless you see your folly in time, and repent and forsake it, you will inevitably feel, to your unspeakable cost, the most fatal and destructive consequences from a life thus devoted to the pursuit of the sensual pleasures and enjoyments of the present world. The experience of thousands will attest the truth of this declaration. How many in our own times have we known, who have sacrificed their health, their substance, their reputation, their peace of mind, and in short, every thing valuable, to the empoisoned cup of licentious indulgence, held out to giddy and unthinking mortals by the inviting, but treacherous, hand of sinful pleasure !

Not that you are to suppose the Bible prohibits any pleasures but such as are really hurtful to us, and such as, when inordinately pursued, would infallibly be productive of misery in the end. A moderate and lawful indulgence, therefore, of the several passions implanted in us by our Creator, and such as the law of reason does not disapprove, is by no means forbidden by the law of God. These natural propensities, when regulated by Reason and by Religion, might greatly contribute to our present comfort : whereas, it

is well known, that whenever we transgress the bounds of moderation in the pursuit of any earthly good whatever, we no longer consult our true pleasure, but in reality become enemies to our own peace and happiness.

Setting aside, therefore, for the present, the consideration of the Religion of the Holy Scriptures with respect to a future state, let me beseech all of you, as you value only what is conducive to your present felicity, to pay an unreserved regard to the directions of your Bible. Depend upon it, you will find, by happy experience, that this is the only method by which you can secure to yourselves any real satisfaction in this life.

And this conduct will, moreover, be no less effectual to silence the slanderers of our Holy Religion. Let the enemies of the Bible behold the happy influence it has on the lives of its friends, and they will be ashamed to utter their censures against it. Nay, may we not hope, that by this means, they will be induced to embrace the Religion it reveals, and to pay an implicit obedience to its laws? It is principally owing to the iniquitous lives of the professors of Revealed Religion that Infidels are furnished with a handle against us, and emboldened to propagate their destructive tenets. In order then to arrest the progress of Infidelity, and of course, to promote human happiness, let the world see what genuine peace—what genuine pleasure they enjoy, whose lives are constantly under the regulation of Holy Writ.

But, notwithstanding the great and manifold advantages with regard to *the life that now is*, which must necessarily arise from a regular obedience to the moral precepts of Scripture; yet, it is certain, that these are but small and inconsiderable when set in competition with the unspeakable enjoyments of *the life to come*, even with the *glory that shall hereafter be revealed*,* and with *that crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give, at the day of final accounts, unto all them that love his appearing*†. It may therefore be proper, before I conclude, to bestow some consideration on so important a subject—a subject which, above all others, claims our most serious attention and care.

Now, admitting our condition here to be ever so prosperous,—allowing the whole of life to be one uninterrupted scene of peace, happiness, and pleasure; yet, still we are certain, the day will come about, and we know not how soon, on which the healthiest, the strongest, the most prosperous of the sons of men, must yield to the all-conquering stroke of death. *It is appointed unto all men once to die*, says an apostle. Experience and observation,
speak

* 1 Pet. v. 1.

|

† 2 Tim. iv. 8.

Speak the same language. And when that awful moment arrives, as arrive it will to all, though, then, it will no doubt afford a satisfaction to reflect we had lived agreeably to what Reason directs, yet—on a death-bed, when all earthly scenes, however dear, are vanishing from before us, or rather, we from them—what can furnish the human soul with such comfort and consolation as the cheering prospect of a happy immortality beyond the grave ! At that eventful crisis, it is only the righteous—only those who sincerely believe and obey the Gospel, that can have hope in death. Such and no other, shall most assuredly be ushered into the Paradise of God ; and, at the resurrection of the just, shall be introduced into such a boundless region of pleasure—shall enter on the enjoyment of such an immensity of happiness and delight, as the human mind can have no conception of while it dwells in its present gross and perishable body.

What an animating and enlivening thought is this to the dying Christian ! How triumphantly may he pass the gloomy vale of death, whose faith presents to the eye of his mind such a glorious prospect of the invisible world, and, at the same time, with as great a certainty of its reality, as he once had of the objects of sense when presented to his bodily eyes !

Consider, on the other hand, how dreadful the prospect, either of annihilation, or of being for ever miserable ! And all who continue to live in an habitual disobedience to the Divine law, must, in their own minds, be convinced that one or other of these dismal states will be their inevitable portion at last.

And with regard to the Deist, the most that can be said for him is, that after the very best use of his reasoning faculties, he must still be in a gloomy doubt and uncertainty with respect to futurity ;—nor can he possibly know, by the utmost efforts of his mind, whether he shall ever be conscious of any state of existence hereafter or not, either of bliss or of woe. It is the glorious Gospel of Christ alone that has discovered to us the certainty of a state of Retribution in another life after the present, and that has *brought Life and Immortality to light*.

Let us, however, always remember that, in order to share in the transcendent blessings of the Gospel, either in *the life that now is* or in *that which is to come*, it is necessary that we possess a firm and lively faith in its Divine Author. For, *without such a faith, it is impossible to please God*, and not to please him is to incur his wrath and displeasure.

Besides, it is evidently owing to a want of faith that every wilful breach of the Divine Law, and in consequence, most of the misery in the world, is to be attributed. Whoever, therefore, knowingly perseveres in a course of
iniquity

iniquity of any kind, may be justly pronounced to be under the influence of Infidelity. And he who thus, through *an evil heart of unbelief*, habitually transgresses the commands of God, besides rendering himself miserable here, forfeits, moreover, all title to the benefits of a Redeemer—all hopes of heavenly happiness hereafter, and of course, must expect to share the dreadful portion of the wicked in the *life to come*. For it is a want of this saving and operative grace of Faith that will not only deprive the sinner of that eternal Salvation which God offers to us in his Son, but will, over and above this, sink him in endless perdition. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.** If ye believe not that I am he, says our blessed Lord, *ye shall die in your sins.†*

Hence we may learn the heinousness of unbelief. It is evident that it is a sin of a much deeper die, and a sin, too, much more common than most people seem to be aware of. Let me, therefore, entreat each of you, as you value your present and future well-being, to examine and search your own heart, and that with the strictest scrutiny and impartiality. Endeavour to find out whether any seeds of this vice may not be secretly lurking within your breast, ready to produce, as occasions may offer, the sinful fruits of unrighteousness in your outward life.

As a further reason for divesting yourself of this source of iniquity, consider with what severity the Almighty has frequently punished offenders of this stamp. What provoked God to exclude the children of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, who was the *Father of the faithful and the friend of God*, from the promised inheritance of Canaan, a land that *flowed with milk and honey*, and *which was the glory of all lands*? Was it not because of their murmurings and rebellions against Him in the Wilderness, occasioned through *unbelief* in his promises? *But with whom was he grieved forty years?* says the Apostle to the Hebrews (Chap. iii. 17, 18, and 19.) *was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?* So we see that they could not enter in because of *unbelief*.

Here let us observe, that as the Children of Israel were delivered from Egyptian bondage, and promised on their obedience to the Divine laws, the delightful country of Canaan for an inheritance; and yet, after all, through
unbelief

* John iii. 36.

†

† John viii. 24.

unbelief, cancelled every obligation on the part of Heaven to bestow this promised blessing upon them : so, Christ offers to deliver us from the bondage of sin and death (of which the Egyptian bondage was an emblem), and to translate us into *the inheritance of the saints in light*, provided we believe and obey him. If, however, we *give no credence to his word* ;— if, through want of faith in his promises, we reject such gracious offers, and make no conscience of obeying his laws, we shall not only be excluded from the heavenly Canaan, but shall, moreover, be doomed for ever to wander in the howling wilderness of darkness, horror, and despair.†

Again, the same sin of unbelief and obstinate refusal of the Gospel, did afterwards provoke God to cast off the posterity of these Israelites, even the ancient Jews his peculiar people. *Because of unbelief*, says St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, *they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded but fear*. And what rendered this their unbelief the more inexcusable was, that the Gospel of Christ, besides its own intrinsic worth, came attested to them by miracles the most amazing, and most beneficent to many of their own people. *The works that I do in my Father's name*, said our blessed Saviour to them, *they bear witness of me ; but ye believe not*.‡

And because their offspring, the present Jews, still persist in the infidelity of their forefathers, they continue even to this day, to be fugitives and vagabonds in the earth, being (as the Scriptures had repeatedly foretold they should be) dispersed in almost all countries in the world ; and in general, contemned, despised, and oppressed wherever they are ; having no authority, no empire, nor any settled abode as a nation.

Thus do they afford a convincing proof of the awful judgements of God against unbelievers. They would not believe in the Lord of life and glory, but on the contrary, treated him as a common malefactor, and put him to a cruel and ignominious death. *His blood be on us and on our children*, was the horrid imprecation they uttered in order to promote his crucifixion ; and how wonderfully have these words been fulfilled upon them ever since !

But

† Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all ; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed.

MILTON.

§ Rom. xi. 20.

|

¶ John x. 25, 26.

But though, for their rejection and murder of the Messiah, they have long been *an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word among all nations* ;* yet are they, notwithstanding, (agreeably to various predictions in the Bible) miraculously preserved to this day, a distinct and separate people from all the world besides.

Now, it should be remembered that such very remarkable and awful circumstances have never befallen any people in the world besides the Jews. And this, by the way, affords even a visible, and therefore, a most incontrovertible proof of the authenticity and Divine authority of the Scriptures. Most amazing, astonishing, and even incredible events which, it was foretold in the Bible many hundreds of years ago, should befall God's ancient people for their rejection of the Gospel of his Son, HAVE NOW ACTUALLY COME TO PASS BEFORE OUR EYES. Let every Deist consider this with the attention which is due to it, and no longer doubt either the truth or Divine inspiration of the Bible, but willingly yield to it that credit and obedience it so justly deserves.

As, however, we are taught by an inspired Apostle, that a period shall at length arrive when *all Israel shall be saved,—and ungodliness shall be turned away from Jacob*,† let us therefore pray,—not only in behalf of the Jews (who, during such a number of ages and because of their perseverance in unbelief, have suffered so many and such dreadful calamities), but for all of whatever nation or language, who have not yet embraced the Gospel,—in the words of one of the collects of our Church : “ O merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, “ nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted “ and live, Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks, “ and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy “ word ; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they “ may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one “ fold and one shepherd, under Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth “ with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.”

Deists and Infidels, we know, are generally disposed to cavil at the plan of salvation by Jesus Christ as a matter not to be thoroughly investigated by the powers of human Reason. But, if we consider this inestimable blessing, we shall find in it at least nothing *inconsistent* with Reason. For, without attempting sacrilegiously to pry into the inscrutable ways of Heaven, by impertinently endeavouring to *account* why the Almighty Father required

* Deut. xxviii. 37.

|

† Rom. xi. 26.

his beloved Son to offer himself a sacrifice for the redemption of mankind from the sad consequences of their sins, suffice it to say, that it is perfectly agreeable to Reason to suppose that God, out of his infinite wisdom and love to the human race, chose this method for their salvation, as preferable to any other, and as adapted, with the utmost propriety, to answer the important purpose for which it was intended, namely, that of reconciling a guilty world to his favour and friendship.

Besides this, we are assured both by Reason and Scripture that *the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sins, and obtain eternal redemption for us*; and without an atonement for sin was made by some efficacious means, it does not seem reasonable to suppose that the justice of an infinitely pure and perfect God, whose nature is so abhorrent from all iniquity, could be satisfied. Our reason further suggests that neither could any mortal man expiate or make atonement for his own past transgressions, much less could he or any number of sinful men atone for the transgressions of a lost world. Nor, again, can we suppose that the angels were adequate to so mighty an undertaking, since they are created beings of limited capacities and faculties. None therefore remained, it would appear, who was able to take pity on the human race when fallen from pristine perfection and happiness, but Him whose righteousness is inexhaustible, and *who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption*;* even that Divine Person *who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*†

And “our only Saviour Jesus Christ thus dying for us” hath, “by his precious blood shedding,”‡ not only made our peace with God, but by his return to life again after being three days in the grave, hath given us the strongest evidence of that most comfortable doctrine, *the resurrection of the body*. It was indeed a signal proof of the Divine wisdom and goodness, that the death of Christ should thus answer two most important purposes—should be the means of our reconciliation with God, and at the same time, produce an event, his resurrection from the dead, which, as a proof of our resurrection, might fill us with the most pleasing hope and certain expectation of everlasting life.

We

* 1 Cor. i. 30. | † Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8. | ‡ Communion Service.

We may here further observe, that such a proceeding in Providence with regard to our Redemption, besides evincing the tender mercies and *marvellous loving-kindness* of the Most High towards the miserable sons of men, exhibits to us, also, the malignant and detestable nature of sin, which nothing less than the shedding of the precious blood of the incarnate Son of God could expiate and atone for.

Nay, if we regard only our present welfare, the Scripture account of Christ redeeming us by the inestimable price of his own blood, from the fatal consequences of our sins, is a doctrine calculated to promote, in every respect, our temporal good. Such astonishing love on the part of Heaven, if we have any sense of the greatness of the benefit, cannot fail to excite our devoutest gratitude, to banish all pride and self-arrogance from our hearts, to promote humility and every other amiable and engaging virtue ; and in short, to *stablish us in every good word and work**

What has been said under this head may serve to convince us how accumulated and enormous the guilt of those must be, who not only *disbelieve the record that God gave of his Son*,† but, moreover, studiously endeavour to disseminate the seeds of infidelity in a world in which it already, with all its sinful fruits, but too much abounds. Our reason in this case would suggest to us, that surely for such will hereafter be assigned a more than ordinary punishment, And, conformably to reason, the Gospel declares, that *if he that despised Moses' law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace*.‡

As a proof of the sincerity of his deistical tenets, the Author of the *Age of Reason* informs us that, when ill of a fever, from which he was not expected even by himself to recover, he remembered with renewed satisfaction that he had written the first part of the *Age of Reason*, and that, therefore, he knew by experience the conscientious trial of his own principles. To all this it is well replied, by a pious and learned Prelate,§ that “ though this declaration of Mr Paine might be a proof of the *sincerity* of his persuasions, yet it could not be any proof of the *truth* of his principles.”

And does not the apostle St. Paul inform us that there shall be some who *will not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved, and to whom on that account, God shall send strong delusions, permitting them to believe*

a

* 2 Thess. ii. 17. | † 1 John v. 10. | ‡ Heb. x. 28, 29. | § Bishop of Landaff.

a lie?¶ The Spirit of God, we are further told, will not always strive with man;† and certain it is, that there have been but too many lamentable instances of men who, having long resisted the spirit of grace and *not liking to retain God in their knowledge, have at last been given over by Him to a reprobate mind,‡—to eat of the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices.§*

How far this may be the case with Mr Paine, it belongs not to me to determine. I sincerely hope that the door of mercy may yet be open for him, and that the Saviour, who is ever ready to receive every penitent sinner, is still by his Spirit knocking for entrance at the door of his heart. May he at last hear the voice of the Son of God and live! May he give free and full admittance to so honourable a guest! And, having repented that he had basely *denied the Lord that bought him*, may he so sincerely and cordially believe in Christ as to observe an uniform and devout obedience to his laws; and then shall he, with other true penitents, most assuredly be saved.

For ought we know to the contrary, Thomas Paine may yet become, as some other Deists have, a striking monument of the Divine mercy;—he may still live to declare to the world the evil and destructive nature of unbelief, and the long-suffering goodness of God in rescuing him from the gulph of perdition. In this hope then, let us all, in the spirit of Christian charity pray, that, ere long, such may be the case with this noted unbeliever; and that he may henceforth become the honoured instrument of converting more to God by the conspicuousness of a genuine repentance than those he has hitherto occasioned to *err from the faith* by the sophistry of his *Age of Reason*. But to return:

With regard to the composure of mind and conscious approbation experienced by Mr Paine when the shafts of death seemed pointed at his breast, I shall only observe, that frequently have I stood by the bed of the sick, and witnessed the deepest regret and remorse for their having been, during the season of health, inattentive to the directions of the Bible, and to that great salvation through Jesus Christ which it discovers to the world; but never yet have I met with one who lamented that he had through life made the Scriptures his guide. Instead of this, what comfort and consolation, what ardent desire to depart, and to be with Christ;*—to be absent from the body

and

¶ 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. | † Gen. vi. 3. | ‡ Rom. i. 28. | § Prov. i. 31.

* Phil. i. 23.

and to be present with the Lord,|| has the consciousness of having lived as the Gospel directs, inspired the devout Christian with at a time when all earthly comforts were deserting him. Death, which is a terror to the *unbeliever*, proves thus to the *faithful* a most welcome visitor, freeing him from the troubles of human life;—opening to him the portals of an everlasting day;—and ushering him into the company of *the spirits of just men made perfect*.

In that blissful state he shall meet again his nearest and dearest relatives and friends who have died in the faith and fear of God, and shall be for ever united with them in the closest bond of friendship, harmony, and love. And here, also, shall he remain till the judgement of the great day. At that eventful period his sleeping dust shall, by the sound of the trumpet, be raised from the grave; and, being *fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ*,* shall be united to his soul never more to be separated. After which he shall be welcomed, by his Redeemer, with—*Come thou blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world.***

His happiness and bliss being now consummated, he shall immediately join the delightful society of glorified saints and angels, yea, he shall become an assessor with the great God himself, whose presence will perpetually inspire joy and gladness into his heart.

To conclude, in this completely blest abode, *all the just who have lived by faith* shall enjoy for ever pleasures without alloy—*pleasures which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive*†—even those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore.‡

O blessed and superlatively happy state! May the Divine Spirit so strengthen our faith in that Book of books, the Holy Bible, as to enable us sincerely to believe the reality of all those *glorious things that are spoken of thee, O city of God*;† and, as the fruits of that belief, *to walk in all the ways which the Lord our God hath commanded us*.¶ Then shall we not only secure to ourselves a portion of the felicity of the present life, but shall hereafter, arrive at that *holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem*, where joys unutterable shall for ever abound; and where *there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away, and behold all things are made new*.|||

|| 2 Cor. v. 8. | * Phil. iii. 21. | ** Matt. xxv. 34. | † 1 Cor. ii. 9.
§ Psalm xvi. 11. | ‡ Psalm lxxxvii. 3. | ¶ Deut. v. 33. | ||| Rev. xxi. 4, 5.

ERRATA.

Page 7 line 2 before unexpectedly insert have

27 28 *for in attention read inattention*

39 18 *for easily read easily*

46 18 *for could read could*

